

# The Electronic Word-of-Mouth Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type on Consumer Purchase Behaviour

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to examine the mediating role of product type (i.e., product-luxury perceptions) on consumer response to online reviews and the subsequent effect on purchase behaviour. Specifically, this thesis explicates the influence of review valence and review volume in shaping the consumers' product evaluation, which in turn affects their purchase intentions for the focal product. An experimental design is adopted for this research. To examine the possible effects of product type and online reviews on consumer response, an online experiment based on a review website platform is conducted, using a 2×2×3 between-subjects factorial design. In the experiment, participants were exposed to one of twelve conditions involving the manipulation of the three independent variables (review valence, review volume and product type). A total of 432 participants were included in the final analyses, which were recruited via online convenience sampling on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Factorial ANCOVA analysis was conducted to test the hypothesised relationships. The results indicated three interaction effects between review valence, review volume and product type on consumer decision-making. A two-way interaction effect of review valence and product type, confirmed that product type mediates the influence of review valence on product attitude, product evaluation and purchase intent. Results also indicated that luxury products are less susceptible to the influence of review valence, which equates to lower purchase intentions than the non-luxury counterpart when exposed to positive reviews. A recurrent main effect of review valence was present, with results indicating a negativity bias on the perceived informative value and persuasiveness of online reviews, which was also salient in information adoption. Review volume had one main effect and tended to emerge as significant through mediating variables. Moreover, product type elicited a main effect for six dependent measures. Product involvement, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (i.e., social learning and social belonging) and materialism were found to have exogenous effects (covariates). The managerial and theoretical implications are discussed for this research, along with suggested directions for future research.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the advent of the Internet, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become a valuable source of product-related information for consumers (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been conceptualised as *“any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”* (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003, p. 62). eWOM is often articulated in the form of online consumer reviews. Online retailers, such as Amazon.com and TripAdvisor, present not only product-related information that originates from the manufacturer to potential customers, but they also provide consumers the opportunity to read and write user-generated reviews sharing experiences with and evaluations of the focal product (Ziegele & Weber, 2015).

The internet has become a prosperous marketplace, where purchasing products online is an increasingly common practice (e.g., Floyd, Freling, Alhoqail, Cho, & Freling, 2014; Riegner, 2007). Indeed, the convenience of the online buying process and access to readily available product-related information are prominent motives for online purchases (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). In fact, user-generated content is considered a more trustworthy source of information than traditional media (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006), which has led to a growing share of consumers adopting online reviews into their purchase decisions (Riegner, 2007; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Ziegele & Weber, 2015). Several studies have recognised the strong influence of online reviews on purchase intentions, due to its verified role as a predictor of product sales in various product categories, specifically, movies (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad, 2007; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Liu, 2006), video games (Cui, Lui, & Guo, 2012; Zhu & Zhang, 2010) and hotels (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009). Not surprisingly, the fashion industry has sought to adapt to the online marketplace, developing new online business models to effectively reach and persuade the digitalized consumers (Doherty, 2004). As such, luxury fashion brand managers need to understand how to leverage online product reviews to promote product sales.

Customer reviews and their effects on purchase decisions have received substantial attention in extant research. For instance, it has been revealed that positive reviews elicit a positivity effect on product-related attitudes and the purchase intentions of prospective buyers (Park & Lee, 2008; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). Previous studies have also examined the motives of reviewers and readers of online reviews (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003),

as well as the deduced causal attributions to customer reviews (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007), and the perceived credibility and diagnosticity of user-generated information (Filieri, 2015; Zhang, Zhao, Cheung, & Lee, 2014a). A large portion of research has also been dedicated to understanding the augmented influence of review dimensions on purchase behaviour, such as review valence (Lee, Park, & Han, 2008a; Zhang, Craciun, & Shin, 2010a), the number of reviews (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013; Park & Lee, 2008), argument quality (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008; Zhang et al., 2014a), product involvement (Park et al., 2007) and product type (Cui et al., 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007). However, despite the developing body of research efforts, previous studies have largely overlooked identifying the more salient review dimensions that foster purchase intent for luxury fashion products. Accordingly, this research sought to explicate the mechanisms through which review dimensions (i.e., review valence and review volume) unfold their persuasive power across varying product-luxury perceptions.

## **1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

The aim of this research is to determine the nature of the relationship between review valence, review volume and product type on purchase behaviour. Specifically, the research seeks to establish the mediating role of product-luxury perceptions (i.e., product type) on the influence of review metrics, explicating the differential effects in the relative weight accorded to each dimension in decision-making. In order to establish the more salient and influential review metric (review valence vs. review volume) across product manipulations, and to identify the product that sustains the largest augmented influence of each metric on purchase behaviour.

An individual's approach to the evaluative process is affected by product characteristics, in terms of their search and use of information sources in their decision-making, which in turn influences their purchase intention (King & Balasubramanian, 1994; Sundaram & Webster, 1999). Several studies have validated the moderating role of product characteristics on the effect of online reviews, in relation to hedonic versus utilitarian product (Sen & Lerman, 2007) and search versus experimental goods (Cui et al., 2012; Park & Lee, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). However, there has been a lack of research investigating the influence of intangible luxury attributes, when considering the veracity of online reviews. A consensus exists in extant literature on the clear distinction between luxury and non-luxury products. Consumers evaluate non-luxury products on the potential to maximise functional utility, where utility is a function of tangible product attributes (Drolet, Simonson, & Tversky, 2000). It is also known that consumer judgement on such products is cognitively driven, instrumental and goal-orientated, which focuses on accomplishing a functional task (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). While luxury products, however, tend to provide subjective

psychological benefits that extend beyond the traditional utility maximization (Dubois & Laurent, 1994). Indeed, luxury products are often consumed for the hedonic experience (Silverstein and Friske, 2003) and the symbolic meaning signalled to significant others (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), for which consumers are willing to pay a premium (Allsopp, 2005). Notably, such functional considerations require a reasons-based evaluation, whereas luxury products entail an affect-based evaluation (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009). Intuitively, the subjective nature of luxury consumption depends on an individual's perception of hedonic and social value, and accordingly, the judgemental criteria are ambiguous across product evaluations. Based on such distinctive set of product characteristics, consumers are expected to adopt different approaches to processing online reviews based on the change in consumption motives and expectations, as they move along the continuum from non-luxury to luxury products (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010).

According to Kapferer (1997), discontinuity exists in the perceived luxury attributed to brands. Previous studies have recognised that some luxury brands are striking a balance between mass consumption and the perceived exclusivity of luxury (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Researchers have used the terms "mass affluence" (Nunes, Johnson, & Breene, 2003) and "democratization of luxury" (Kapferer, 2006) to refer to the phenomenon. Drawing on the three-tier luxury pyramid conceptualised by Kapferer (2006), this research sought to operationalise mid-luxury products which are those 'accessible', mass-produced, popular luxuries on the lower-tier, versus high-luxury products that are expensive, exclusive to the affluent higher echelon and symbolise unparalleled prestige constitute the upper-tier. Accordingly, this research examined whether any differential effects were present across consumer responses to online reviews pertaining to mid-luxury and high-luxury products, while also considering the non-luxury counterpart.

Considerable research has been dedicated to examining the persuasive effects of review valence on consumer behaviour and, accordingly, it has become arguably the most studied variable in extant eWOM literature (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Review valence refers the evaluative direction of the review, which can be either negative, neutral, or positive (Fiske, 1980; Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009). Although within the parameters of this research, only positively-framed reviews providing a favourable product recommendation to others and negatively-framed reviews accentuating product weaknesses to discourage purchase are considered. Previous studies have shown that review valence has a positive effect on purchase intentions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lee et al., 2008a). Moreover, individuals make distinctions on the perceived credibility and diagnosticity of online reviews on the basis of review valence (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), which are key determinants

of review adoption (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009; Mizerski, 1982; Schlosser, 2005). Therefore, it is an important review dimension to consider when establishing purchase behaviour. The research background of review valence is discussed in Chapter Two. In particular, this research aims to understand the responsiveness of consumers to the evaluative tone of online reviews for products associated with varying degrees of perceived product-luxury.

Another review dimension related to this research was review volume, which has been proven to affect product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008a; Liu, 2006). Review volume is operationalized as the number of online reviews posted by consumers for a particular product. Extant research has indicated that when product quality proves difficult to evaluate, consumers display a propensity to become more reliant on heuristic cues, in particular, product popularity as signaled by the number of reviews available, to make quality inferences (Park & Lee, 2008; Zeithaml, 1988). The perceived popularity of products is based on the evaluative criteria that 'more is better' (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) as it provides evidence of social desirability which, in turn, has been found to increase purchase intentions (Park et al., 2007). Given that perceived exclusivity reinforces the status symbolism of a luxury product (Phau & Prendergast, 2000), such perceived product popularity inferences may exacerbate purchase intentions. Therefore, this research sought to examine how varying degrees of luxury attributed to the focal product may mediate the effect of review volume on purchase considerations.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Based on the preceding discussion, this research aims to achieve the following research objectives.

- To determine how the relationship between review valence, review volume and product type affects information processing and the evaluative process, and ascertain the resultant effect on purchase intention.
- To identify the review dimension (review valence vs. review volume) that is more influential in shaping purchase intentions for luxury products.
- To determine if review valence and review volume have a differential effect on purchase behaviour for mid-luxury and high-luxury products.

### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is concerned with consumer responses to review dimensions across various product-luxury perceptions within an online review context, which can be measured when manipulating these variables in an experimental design. Hence, this research adopts a 2×2×3



between-subjects factorial design to test the effects of review valence, review volume and product type on consumers' evaluative process and their resultant purchase behaviour.

## **1.5 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS**

This research presents both theoretical and managerial implications. The research findings are expected to contribute to extant theory in the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), consumer behaviour, and brand management domains of marketing literature. A theoretical contribution on the mediating role of perceived product-luxury has on the influence of online reviews during information processing as well as the evaluative considerations undergone by consumers in the online consumption context is anticipated. In addition, it is expected this research will provide marketers of luxury products a greater understanding of the weight accorded to various review dimensions in consumer decision-making and their aggregated influence on purchase intentions. These insights will enable marketers to create an e-marketing strategy tailored to achieve the optimal consumer response for luxury products.

### **1.5.1 Theoretical Implications**

This research contributes to extant eWOM literature by examining the untested relationship between review valence, review volume and product type on purchase behaviour. This research addresses the research gap identified by You, Vadakkepatt, and Joshi (2015), through providing a nuanced understanding of the moderating role of perceived product-luxury on the eWOM effect. Furthermore, the research will explicate the evaluative process undergone by individuals as a result of review valence and review volume metrics and how this translates into purchase behaviour for non-luxury, mid-luxury and high-luxury products.

### **1.5.2 Managerial Implications**

This research will provide marketers with an understanding of the relative importance of review valence and review volume metrics in consumer decision-making and the influence on purchase intentions for non-luxury, mid-luxury and high-luxury products. Markets can leverage this information to create an effective e-marketing strategy to monitor and manage online reviews, which is tailored to stimulate high purchase behaviour for each product-luxury manipulation.

## **1.6 THESIS OUTLINE**

This thesis consists of five chapters. The current chapter has introduced the research and provided justification for the chosen subject area, indicated the current research gap, introduced the concepts to be studied and presented the aims that directed this research.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, provides a more detailed discussion of the three concepts (review volume, review valence and product type) outlined in this chapter, including extant research and theory relevant to understanding consumer behaviour. The chapter also discussed the research gap and presented the research hypotheses. Covariate variables were also identified and their predicted impact on the resultant outcome is deliberated.

Chapter Three, Methodology, outlines the methods adopted for this research. The development of the online experiment and stimuli, sampling procedures and questionnaire are discussed. The results of the pre-test and the consequent adjustments to the final questionnaire are presented.

Chapter Four, Results, presents the findings of the research including a sample overview and hypothesis testing.

Chapter Five, Results Discussion, concludes the thesis with a discussion of the main research findings, research implications and limitations. Directions for future research are also suggested.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to provide a detailed overview of the theoretical background that forms the basis of this research. Information processing theory was addressed first in this chapter. Review valence was then examined; beginning with a discussion of the saliency of negative and positive information in consumer decision-making, followed by a look at the asymmetric effects presented in extant research. A subsequent discussion on the effects of review volume was included, which examined the information overload under the informant role of dual-processing theory and then product popularity inferences under the recommender role. Consumer goods and luxury consumption are then presented, incorporating a discussion of the relative attributes that define each product category. Extant literature on the moderating role of product type on the effects of online reviews was discussed in two sections, namely, the impact on review valence and then review volume. The current research gap was then summarised. Finally, the research hypotheses were presented with supporting theory and the chapter is concluded.

### 2.1 INFORMATION PROCESSING THEORY

Accompanying the advance of the Internet, online consumer reviews have emerged as a key source of information sought by consumers to assist their purchase decision-making. User-generated content has become a more trusted source of information than traditional media for consumers (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Notably, the pervasive dissemination of eWOM moderates the market success of products, and therefore, it is vital to understand the level of consideration given to such articulations by consumers in their purchase decisions. With regard to this latter aspect, it is important to determine the motives that incline consumers to seek-out and read information online. Motivations are the underlying reasons for behaviour (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003), and therefore, accounting for consumer motives will shape our understanding of the effects eWOM has on consumer behaviour.

The information search, as defined by Schmidt and Spreng (1996), is the stage in decision-making process where consumers actively gather and process information from multiple sources prior to making a product choice. Previous research (e.g., Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Klein & Ford, 2003) has recognised that basic information economic theory continues to drive the information search with relation to amount of time invested and number of sources covered. Several studies compare consumer motives for online opinion seeking as similar to those derived from traditional word-of-mouth theories (e.g., Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). A review of the literature identifies several theoretically supported motives for consumers to seek eWOM, these include: a) to reduce risk associated with purchase decision (Kim, Mattila, & Baloglu, 2011;

Maity, Dass, & Malhotra, 2014); b) to alleviate product uncertainty (Urbany, Dickson, & Wilkie, 1989); c) to reduce search and evaluation efforts (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003); and d) to find social assurance (Bailey, 2005). Researchers have also focused on the moderating role of product characteristics on motives for online opinion seeking.

Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) conceptualised the first framework that delineates five categories of consumer motives for online opinion seeking. Several recent studies have found evidence to further support this particular set of motives. Firstly, the motive to achieve 'social orientation through information' is reinforced by the findings from Bailey (2005), who alludes to social assurance driving consumers to seek online confirmation from others to evaluate the product and its associated social prestige. Collectively, these studies reaffirm that social influence theory will help to elucidate an understanding of the effect eWOM has on consumer decision-making. Another motive outlined by Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) is 'obtaining buying-related information,' which comprises consumer initiatives to reduce both risk and search time when making a purchase decision. Likewise, Bailey (2005) and Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) find further support for this motive, adding that searching for product-related information is a basic utilitarian motive inducing consumer to seek eWOM. These findings are consistent with established theory on perceived risk that assumes that consumers engage in information search in an attempt to minimise the perceived risk associated with a purchase decision (Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991). Recently, Maity, Dass and Malhotra (2014) confirmed that a positive relationship exists between perceived risk and information search.

Other motives from Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) framework were 'community membership,' referring to consumers' drive to learn about new products and belong to a virtual community, 'remuneration' and 'learning how the product is consumed'. Overall the framework identifies five theoretically derived motives that are subsequently supported by quantitative research. Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) mentions an additional motive of securing lower prices, a finding supported by Maity, Dass and Malhotra (2014) who found consumers with greater financial constraints will search for more information. Overall, these studies (Bailey, 2005; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003) identify key motives inducing consumers to seek eWOM. However, the findings from these studies may be limited to the context of online review sites, since these motives may vary across various online platforms such as social networking sites.

Online product reviews provide a valuable source of product-related information for consumers (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Following on from our understanding of why consumers seek eWOM, it

is important to identify and explicate the key antecedents and moderators of the effect of eWOM on consumer behaviour. Extant literature has focused on understanding the ways in which consumers evaluate the characteristics of eWOM communication, in order to uncover the key determinants that lead to the adoption of online information into their purchase decision-making.

There are subtle complexities that affect the way eWOM messages are conveyed and consumed by consumers. Considering that there are cognitive and motivational issues, most studies examine the effect of eWOM messages by manipulating the characteristics of eWOM messages in an experimental setting. Furthermore, these studies apply the tenets of information processing theories (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to elucidate how consumers evaluate online WOM information. In recent years, researchers have placed more emphasis on theoretical development and empirical testing in this research area, in order to gain a greater understanding on the influences posed by online reviews (e.g., Zhang et al., 2014a). Indeed, information processing theory forms the basis of an understanding on why consumers respond to online reviews in a certain manner. Accordingly, the following sub-sections will provide extant research on each of the three variables of interest.

## 2.2 REVIEW VALENCE

Considerable research has been dedicated to examining the persuasive effects of review valence on consumer behaviour and, accordingly, it has become arguably the most studied variable in extant eWOM literature (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Word-of-mouth is a prominent facet of consumer choice (East, Hammond, & Wright, 2007), where recommendation valence presents a key source of product information (Keaveney, 1995). The valence of a review denotes its evaluative direction, which can be either negative, neutral, or positive (Fiske, 1980; Lee et al., 2009). A neutral review presents descriptive information about the target product without any evaluative direction (Lee et al., 2009). Positively-framed reviews emphasise the finest attributes of the product and provide a favourable recommendation to others, while negatively-framed reviews accentuate the product weaknesses and thereby discourage others from making the purchase (Cheung et al., 2009; Dellarocas et al., 2007).

Review valence can be reflected by numerical ratings (i.e., 1-5 star rating scale) or textual content, and represents a function of product quality. These persuasive effects of review valence shape product evaluations, where positive reviews are indicative of product quality and reputation (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Cui et al., 2012). Despite researchers having devoted extensive attention to understanding consumer responsiveness to the evaluative tone of the online reviews, the findings on review valence have failed to provide a consistent conclusion.

## 2.2.1 Salience of Review Valence

### 2.2.1.1 Negativity Bias

Three arguments prevail in extant literature on the salience of review valence effects. One attests a negativity effect, proposing that negative information is more diagnostic than positive information since it is scarce, novel, and not readily available (Chiou & Cheng, 2003; East et al., 2007; Fiske, 1980). Such intuition is elucidated by cue diagnosticity theory (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), supporting the notion that individuals have a psychological tendency to devote more attention and accord greater weight to negative information than positive information, an occurrence referred to as negativity bias (Fiske, 1980; Homer & Yoon, 1992). When individuals form impressions of a product, they use available information on the basis of diagnosticity judgements (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). In particular, individuals make distinctions by means of ascertaining a cue's usefulness. Indeed, the perceived credibility and diagnosticity of the review are the main determinants of review adoption (Cheung et al., 2009; Mizerski, 1982; Schlosser, 2005).

Individuals form attributions via a perceptual and cognitive process that uses prior knowledge and extant information to establish a causal inference (Kelley, 1967). Such causal attributions differ according to the information valence (Mizerski, 1982), since positive information is consistent with social norms while negative information is counter normative (Kanouse & Hanson, 1987). Moreover, individuals make causal inferences in a loss-aversion manner, and accordingly, link product-related attributions to negative reviews and non-product attributions to positive ones in order to minimize risk and evade prospective losses (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

Several studies support the notion that positive reviews are more attributed to the reviewer (vs. product experience) than negative reviews (Chen & Lurie, 2013; Gilbert & Malone, 1995). Since the receiver is less likely to deduce product-related attributions to positive reviews as other causal inferences, such as social norms and peer pressure, appear plausible reasons for a reviewer to engage in positive electronic word-of-mouth. However, when considering negative reviews, individuals have confidence in discounting non-product related causes and attribute it to the product itself (Jones & Davis, 1965; Mizerski, 1982). Intuitively, individuals consider online reviews attributed to the product experience to have a greater informative value (Chen & Lurie, 2013). As a result, a negativity effect tends to arise, since consumers value positive reviews less than negative reviews which, in turn, leads to positive reviews exerting a weaker influence on purchase decisions (Basuroy, Chatterjee, & Ravid, 2003; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Moreover, product-related attributions for a review have a positive influence on review credibility and diagnosticity perceptions (Qiu, Pang, & Lim, 2012), where those with non-product related attributions cause individuals to be less confident

in the reviewer's integrity and expertise. Diagnosticity of the information is operationalised by the perceived usefulness of information in making a judgement (Dick, Chakravarti, & Biehal, 1990; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). During information processing, perceived diagnosticity of information is a determinant of review adoption in decision-making process (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Wang & Wei, 2006).

Inferences drawn on the negativity effect recognise that it materialises as a direct function of the consumer's social environment, since there tends to be a greater number of positive cues which leads to negative cues being perceived as counter normative (Homer & Yoon, 1992; Kanouse & Hanson, 1987). By virtue of its rarity, negative information is perceived as more instrumental for categorizing products as poor-quality than positive information is for assigning a high-quality classification (Fiske, 1980; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). A consensus exists across several studies in regards to positive and negative reviews eliciting asymmetric effects, such that negative information in general exerts a stronger influence than positive information (Chen & Lurie, 2013; Cui et al., 2012; Herr et al., 1991; Lee et al., 2009; Xue & Zhou, 2011; Yang & Mai, 2010). Negative information induces poor quality perceptions of the focal product, which in turn reinforces the negativity effect on purchase decisions in accordance with the loss aversion principle in prospect theory that alludes to potential losses appearing larger than gains (Lee et al., 2008a; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

In an online review context, it has become evident that the negativity effect manifests itself in a number of outcomes, including product choice, brand evaluations (Lee et al., 2009), trust perceptions (Xue & Zhou, 2011), purchase intentions (Sen & Lerman, 2007) and product sales (Basuroy et al., 2003; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas et al., 2007). One reason for this phenomenon was outlined by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), who found that the infrequent occurrence of one-star negative reviews leads consumers to assign weight more heavily to negative information. In line with this, Cui et al. (2012) further agrees that the negativity effect arises due to the novel and counter-normative nature of negative reviews. Accordingly, individuals perceive negative reviews to be more diagnostic and useful than positive ones (Lee & Koo, 2015). Other research from Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), however, finds evidence of confirmatory bias (Klayman & Ha, 1987) referring to consumers drive to seek affirmative evidence to support a predetermined product choice. Despite the negativity effect having well-documented empirical support, several studies investigating review valence have been unable to find a significant effect of negative reviews (Schindler & Bickart, 2012; Wu, 2013b).

### ***2.2.1.2 Positivity Bias***

A second argument asserts a positivity effect that has been observed in prior research (Clemons, Gao, & Hitt, 2006; Gershoff, Mukherjee, & Mukhopadhyay, 2003; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), although less frequently investigated. Such a positivity effect has materialised due to perceptions of positive information being more accessible with greater diagnostic value than negative information (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). In regards to judgements of ability, positive behavioural information (successes) has been empirically proven to be more influential than negative information (failure) (Reeder & Fulks, 1980; Reeder, Henderson, & Sullivan, 1982). Similarly, another finding in the social psychology literature, ascertained that positive information regarding success is attributed to product ability, and therefore, used to inform ability judgements, while negative information regarding failure is attributed to situational factors and disregarded in ability judgements (Surber, 1984; Tillman & Carver, 1980). In an online context, Pan and Zhang (2011) found empirical evidence of positivity bias, materialising from perceived review helpfulness being greater for positive rather than negative reviews. Another finding revealed that reviews containing temporal continuity cues, indicating the review writing followed closely after product consumption mitigates negativity bias by increasing consumers' perceived value of positive reviews (Chen & Lurie, 2013).

Individuals who process persuasive information in a goal-supporting manner (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000) are likely to confront counter-attitudinal, negative information by deducing its influence to alleviate cognitive dissonance with their decision pre-commitment (Festinger, 1962). Accordingly, these individuals engage in confirmatory bias by disputing the information, challenging source credibility, or disregarding the information (Ahluwalia, 2000; Tormala & Petty, 2004a, 2004b). Such pre-committed individuals can resist negative information that is highly divergent from their pro-target attitude, as the challenge evokes strong belief-bolstering responses. Khare, Labrecque, and Asare (2011) contend that a high volume of online reviews has a stronger, more diagnostic influence over purchase decisions, since it exerts a heightened pressure of social opinion.

When a high volume of negative reviews confronts a pre-committed individual, it imposes a challenge to their pro-target attitude and incites them to defend their beliefs, which in turn strengthens their preferences (less negative) for that negatively-rated product. However, a low volume of reviews will have no effect on the preferences of a pre-committed consumer (Khare et al., 2011). Consistent with this notion, Floh, Koller, and Zauner (2013) contend that individuals often read online reviews to reinforce and support a predetermined product preference.



### **2.2.1.3 Non-effect of Review Valence**

Another validated argument is that review valence does not create any differential effect (Cheung et al., 2009; Doh & Hwang, 2009). For example, following the analysis of consumer reviews posted on 'Yahoo! Movies' discussion board, Duan et al. (2008a) reported that review valence had an insignificant effect on box office performance. This finding is consistent with Liu (2006). Likewise, a study from Cheung et al. (2009) considered various product categories and concluded that review valence makes no difference to message credibility.

Neutral or balanced reviews, in particular, have consistently been found to exert minimal influence on consumer behaviour (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015; Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld, 2008; Purnawirawan, De Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2012). Balanced reviews (3 out of 5 stars rating) are considered as less informative than reviews conveying a clearly negative (1-2 stars) or positive (4-5 stars) opinion (Forman et al., 2008). This perception is driven by the explicit implications that unequivocal reviews (swaying towards positive or negative) impose on purchase decisions, whereas equivocal reviews (neutral) present ambiguous information (Purnawirawan et al., 2012). Accordingly, Ballantine and Yeung (2015) found that balanced reviews have an insignificant effect on purchase decisions. Such findings are consistent with social categorization theory, which indicates that extreme cues are perceived to be less ambiguous (Reeder et al., 1982) and, subsequently, are more diagnostic (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989) than cues of a moderate strength.

### **2.2.2 Asymmetric effects of Review Valence**

Several studies have found empirical evidence to suggest that review valence has a significant effect on purchase behaviour. For instance, Sen and Lerman (2007) found review valence to elicit significant effects, especially in the case of utilitarian products. Similarly, Ketelaar, Willemsen, Sleven, and Kerkhof (2015) found that review valence has a significant effect on purchase intentions, which is moderated by receiver expertise. Overall, these studies confirm that positively-framed (negatively-framed) reviews have a significant positive (negative) effect on purchase behaviour. Such consistency across findings may be explained by these studies applying experimental design (e.g., Ketelaar et al., 2015; Sen & Lerman, 2007; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). However, these results are contradicted by field studies using real-world data to measure the effects of online reviews (Duan et al., 2008a; Liu, 2006).

Such contradictory results may stem from the use of various methodologies, since most studies that reported significant effects of review valence adopted an experimental design (Ketelaar et al., 2015; Xue & Zhou, 2011), whereas those studies that found insignificant effects used aggregate market-level analysis (Duan et al., 2008a; East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008; Liu, 2006; Wu, Wu, Sun,

& Yang, 2013). The latter approach of using objective market parameters (i.e., five-star review ratings and sales) improves the external validity of the study findings. Consideration of both methodologies used by previous studies can elucidate on such inconsistent findings. A potential explanation is that, unlike experimental design, field studies are unable to control for audience heterogeneity (Chakravarty, Liu, & Mazumdar, 2010). That is, these studies cannot overlook the possibility that variation in product sales is attributable to individual differences. Accordingly, a number of experimental studies have investigated individual-level differences as moderators to elucidate on the inconsistent relationship between review valence and message effectiveness, such as product knowledge (Lee & Koo, 2012), involvement (Lee et al., 2008a), and receiver expertise (Ketelaar et al., 2015; Park & Kim, 2008a).

## 2.3 REVIEW VOLUME

Extant literature has found empirical evidence to suggest that review volume has a significant impact on the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) effect (Park & Kim, 2008a; Park et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2014a). Review volume is operationalized as the number of online reviews posted by consumers for a particular product. At the market-level, several studies have shown that eWOM volume exhibits a positive correlation with product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan et al., 2008a; Liu, 2006). Specifically, Duan et al. (2008a) examined online word-of-mouth as an endogenous variable that is influenced by product sales as well as contributing to product sales. The findings revealed that the volume of online reviews generates an awareness effect which, in turn, plays an important role in driving movie sales. Two studies, Dellarocas et al. (2007) and Liu (2006), also reported that review volume can be a predictor of product sales. Other studies examined the influence of review volume on individual-level outcomes. Zhang et al. (2014a) found that consumers are more inclined to purchase products with a higher volume of reviews.

Several studies examine the moderating role of receivers' characteristics, such as consumer involvement (Park & Lee, 2008; Park et al., 2007) and expertise (Park & Kim, 2008a), on the impact of review volume and the subsequent effect on the receiver's purchase decision. Furthermore, these studies applied dual-process theory to explain how receiver characteristics moderate the eWOM effect in information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). A large number of reviews represent an indication of product popularity and a vast amount of product information. The dual roles of online reviews moderate an individual's cognitive processing of review volume, which in turn affects their purchasing intentions. From a recommender role perspective, the number of online reviews provides a heuristic cue that functions as a positive or negative indicator of product popularity. Accordingly, a large volume of positive reviews evokes a favourable attitude from individuals as it

indicates a popular product (Park & Lee, 2008). Under the informant role, however, a greater number of online reviews equates to more information on the focal product. An undesirable consequence arises, as consumers become overwhelmed from having 'too much' information available to process, triggering information overload to materialise (Park & Lee, 2008).

### **2.3.1 Information Overload**

Previous research has found evidence to suggest that a greater volume of positively-framed online reviews will likely be reflected in higher product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Park et al., 2007). However, these studies lacked any consideration of the probable occurrence of information overload. Park and Lee (2008) contend that this 'natural state' is not constantly valid, since information overload can occur.

Prior to purchasing a product, consumers feel impelled to process the majority of available information under the informant role. Subsequently, exposure to vast amounts of information can impose a cognitive burden on individuals, as further strain is placed on their limited processing capacity in attempts to comprehend 'too much' information in a narrow timeframe (Malhotra, 1984). To avoid becoming overwhelmed, individuals opt to carefully read some reviews and adopt a skim-reading strategy to gain an overall impression of unselected reviews. However, in the midst of information processing, consumers may express concern over the detailed information that they disregard. Accordingly, a sense of doubt materialises from information overload, which manifests itself in a loss of confidence, a sense of confusion, and less satisfaction (Park & Lee, 2008).

Information overload has been linked to a reduction in the perceived informativeness of the review set and limitations to user effectiveness in information processing, due to the onset of confusion and cognitive strain (Jacoby, Speller, & Berning, 1974a; Jacoby, Speller, & Kohn, 1974b). Consistent with this notion, Pan and Zhang (2011) found that a surplus of product information seems to reduce the perceived usefulness of any single review, since each additional review is likely to offer marginal information. A reverse effect occurs for a smaller number of reviews, however, since the scarcity of information enhances the importance of each available review as it may offer new information which enhances the perceived helpfulness (Pan & Zhang, 2011).

Previous studies have merely described the negative effect of information overload, especially the deterioration of decision quality (Jacoby et al., 1974b; Keller & Staelin, 1987). However, Park and Lee (2008) contend that such undesirable consequences are not always present. An evident trade-off exists between the dual roles of information processing, where opposite effects are induced from each role in response to changes in review volume. An increase in review volume stimulates a

positive effect incurred from a more prominent signal of product popularity (recommender role), and a negative effect from a decrease in perceived informativeness of the review set (informant role) (Park & Lee, 2008). Indeed, consumer involvement determines the aspect of the information that becomes the point of focus, and accordingly, it has a moderating effect on the occurrence of information overload (Park & Lee, 2008; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981).

### **2.3.2 Product Popularity**

Consumers may adopt a heuristic approach when evaluating products, where the number of online reviews presents an indicator of product popularity. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) posits that attitude changes are based on varying degrees of information processing. Specifically, the model highlights that when consumers lack either the ability or motivation to process detailed information, then persuasive effects materialize via the peripheral route where consumers rely on peripheral cues and heuristics, such as product popularity cues, rather than focal messages. Hence, a product with many online reviews will be accepted by a consumer who considers 'more is better,' without the need to scrutinize and evaluate message content (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Such an approach to processing information stems from a yearning to adhere to overt conformity pressures from a peer group.

Consumers are more inclined to purchase products with a higher volume of reviews (Zhang et al., 2014a). Consistent with this finding, Park and Lee (2009) added that when reviews are largely positive, consumers will infer the product is popular as a result of overt conformity pressures from reference group, which is a finding supported by empirical results of previous studies (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Clemons et al., 2006). Indeed, conformity pressures imposed on individuals are moderated by the number of reviews available. A preliminary study from Asch (1951) reinforces this notion, suggesting that the level of conformity elicited by an individual increases as a direct function of the reference group size. Similarly, Campbell and Fairey (1989) further added that growth in group size creates a stronger effect on conformity and indeed enhances normative pressure.

In an online review context, the reviewers are regarded as one group of potential, current, or previous consumers. Therefore, individuals exposed to a large number of positive reviews are likely to justify their purchase decision by surmising that 'the product has been purchased by many others, thus it is a popular product' in conformity with former consumers (Park et al., 2007). Park and Lee (2008) found empirical evidence to support this theory, where individual perceptions of product popularity were reinforced as a direct inference of a high number of online reviews. Moreover, Park et al. (2007) found that the perceived popularity of products provides evidence of social desirability which, in turn, increases purchase intentions. This positive interaction between review volume and

purchasing behaviour has been validated by a number of field studies, where a greater number of product ratings had a positive significant influence on product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Clemons et al., 2006). Moreover, review volume reinforces the underlying pressures to conform to the valence of group opinion. When consumers are exposed to overall positively-framed reviews for a product, they are likely to perceive the product as desirable in conformity with reviewers. Similarly, when overall negatively-framed reviews are present, consumers may reject or dislike the product in agreeance with reviewers, as to disagree with prevailing opinion of others may cause psychological discomfort (Park & Lee, 2008).

Consumers may seek to conform to the expectations of others as a function of social desirability, through actively managing their own behaviour by observing others' behaviour (Zhu & He, 2002). Often the sheer weight of popular opinion can influence consumers (Rindfleisch & Inman, 1998). Such conformity effects are explained by normative influence, where individuals observe the behaviour of significant others and conform to social expectations to ensure acceptance (Park & Lessig, 1977). A study from Payne, Bettman, and Johnson (1991) highlighted that the need to rationalise one's purchasing decision to peers impels consumers to select popular choices that offer easy justifications. Furthermore, on the basis of social desirability, Rindfleisch and Inman (1998) indicated that perceived popularity elicits a positive effect on brand preference. Based on these findings, it is inferred that the number of online reviews depicts the perceived popularity of the focal product, presenting evidence of social desirability which in turn may increase purchase intentions.

While a large number of online reviews induces purchase intentions, Huang and Chen (2006) explained that such herding effects are offset significantly by negative reviews. Although subsequent negative attitudes can be overcome, given that there is a sufficiently large volume of positive reviews to counteract the negativity effect and improve purchase intentions (Huang & Chen, 2006). Informational influence is another type of social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), where individuals tend to accept information acquired from others as evidence of reality. Since individuals make inferences that others possess more reliable information on products than themselves, and therefore, use online reviews as a basis for their own choices (Bonabeau, 2004).

## 2.4 CONSUMER GOODS AND LUXURY CONSUMPTION

### 2.4.1 Conceptualising Non-Luxury and Luxury Products

Within the eWOM literature, in spite of several studies referring to product characteristics mediating the effect of online reviews, seldom discussed are non-luxury and luxury products in this manner. Luxury brands and products have received extensive attention from scholars, however despite this; there remains no clear consensus on the definition of 'luxury'. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) used 'luxury' to describe prestigious brands positioned in upper-tier of the product category. Such luxury goods are considered objects of desire that provide pleasure (Berry, 1994). Luxury goods are associated with affluence, exclusivity and higher echelon, along with the satisfaction of nonessential wants (Dubois & Laurent, 1994). Aside from functional utility, there is agreement in the literature that use or display of luxury products confers esteem to the user. Hence, luxury products allow consumers to satisfy psychological and functional needs, where such psychological benefits present the key distinguishing factor between non-luxury and luxury products (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

A hedonic dimension exists for luxury goods (Tynan et al., 2010), as reflected in the subjective emotional and affective benefits, together with functional utility, that consumers expect from consumption. Luxury goods can be considered as symbols of personal and social identity (Vickers & Renand, 2003). In accordance, consumers express their delight from consuming luxury branded products that evoke prestige (Dubois & Czellar, 2002) or status (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), or facilitates expression of their uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008). Note that, it is the symbolic/ expressive and experimental/ hedonic value that differentiates luxury products (Tynan et al., 2010). Given the objective utilitarian attributes of non-luxury products, individuals exhibit an exclusive focus on appraising the functional utility of the product (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). In the same vein, Nueno and Quelch (1998) specified that the ratio of functionality to price is relatively low for luxury than non-luxury products, while the ratio of intangible and situational utility to price for luxury goods is considerably high.

Consistent with this notion, the price and quality ratio for luxury brands is the highest in the marketplace, relative to other products with similar tangible features (i.e. non-luxury products) (McKinsey, 1990). Such empirical evidence reaffirms the luxury products have an intangible affective dimension (Li, Li, & Kambele, 2012), beyond the ordinary tangible characteristics associated with non-luxury, and tend to compete on perceived quality, brand awareness, an renowned brand identity, symbolic meaning, and the ability to evoke exclusivity connotations (Heine & Phan, 2011;

Phau & Prendergast, 2000). The latter concept of rarity or exclusivity is a well-documented dimension of luxury goods (Kapferer, 1998; Lynn, 1991).

A theoretical model from Vickers and Renand (2003) differentiates between luxury and non-luxury brands based on three components: functionalism, experientialism and symbolic interactionism. The functional dimension is prevalent in non-luxury goods that use tangible utilitarian attributes to solve extrinsic consumption needs. Experientialism refers to a desire for sensory pleasure, which luxury products enable individuals to satisfy intrinsic/ hedonic needs (Tynan et al., 2010). Moreover, symbolic interactionism refers to the product capability to associate the user with a significant reference group or desired self-image. A fundamental difference exists in the composition of dimensions for non-luxury and luxury products, where the primary value derived from a luxury brand is psychological, dependent on social and individual cues. According to Vickers and Renand (2003), the set of identifiers that constitute a “luxury brand” were non-essential, expensive and high-quality products that are perceived to be prestigious, rare, authentic and exclusive, while providing individuals symbolic and hedonic/ emotional value through product usage.

Since luxury is a subjective construct, a true conception ascertains luxury goods as existing on the polar opposite end of a continuum with ordinary goods, allowing for a working definition which recognises that the point where ordinary ends and luxury begins is a function of individual judgement (Tynan et al., 2010). Moreover, previous studies have deemed that not all luxury brands are equal (Kapferer, 2006; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, 2004). Discontinuity exists in perceived luxury across brands, where Kapferer (1997) allude to a conceptual distinction in the varying degree of ‘luxury’ attributed to brands.

Kapferer (2006) conceptualised a three-tiered luxury pyramid that indicates a distinction exists between luxury brands that are expensive, prime quality, image and status on the upper-tier of luxury and those associated streamlined, mass-produced, accessible luxuries constitute the lower-tier. Similarly, drawing on the dimension of socio-economic class, Alleres (1990) also categorised luxury goods in a three-level hierarchy on the degree of accessibility. The lowest tier is accessible luxury, where the luxury goods are attainable by the middle-socioeconomic class who seek to elevate their social status via luxury consumption. The next level of intermediate luxury is within the financial reach of the professional socio-economic class. The top-tier of the hierarchy is inaccessible luxury, these products are particularly high-priced and provide the user unparalleled social prestige, which is associated with an elite consumer.

### 2.4.2 Luxury Consumption

Classic economic theory assumes that when a rational consumer purchases a product they will seek to maximize utility, and views consumption as a function of supply and demand (Marshall, 1890). However, such logic fails to address the seemingly irrational behaviour of luxury consumption, since luxury goods provide no added functional benefit over non-luxury goods (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Dittmar, 1994; Hudders, 2012). Hence, luxury goods provide a symbolic/intangible benefit that serves as the motive of individuals who show a willingness to pay premium prices for functionally equivalent products (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Previous studies have widely discussed the non-utilitarian motives that drive luxury consumption (e.g. Belk, 1985; Kapferer, 1998; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). These non-utilitarian motives can be considered as being either expressive or impressive in nature (Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010; Hudders, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Specifically, expressive motives focus on the symbolic value and meaning of luxury goods, while hedonic and emotional value is dominant for impressive motives (McCracken, 1986).

Furthermore, luxury value is derived from personal and interpersonal value perceptions (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). The socially-orientated benefits of luxury consumption have a value-expressive function, where individuals focus on the perceived social utility acquired from use of products recognised by significant others, such as conspicuousness and status value, that may affect the evaluation and the proclivity to acquire luxury products (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Luxury value from an individual orientation is driven by concurrent expressive and impressive motives, such as hedonism (e.g., Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), materialism (e.g., Richins & Dawson, 1992), and self-identity (e.g., Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Previous research has indicated the symbolic meaning attached to status-laden products regarding the individual and their social relationships (Dittmar, 1994; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Such research is reinforced by social comparison theory, indicating that individuals tend to conform to the majority opinion of the reference group when forming an attitude (Festinger, 1954). Given that luxury products express prestigious values, social referencing and the enhancement of one's self-concept are determinants of luxury consumption (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). An extended inference of product usage is the signalling of belongingness to a reference group (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Intuitively, consumers purchase luxury goods to gain social recognition, where they signal status via associative links with or actual membership in the right reference groups using applicable brands and products (Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999). Such a socially-directed behaviour denotes status consumption, where individuals strive to enhance their social standing via the acquisition and



conspicuous display of evidence (i.e., luxury product) to confer and symbolise status to themselves and for significant observers (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999). Individuals use status-laden goods to enhance their self-concept and to initiate the social relationships they aspire to enter (Belk, 1988; Braun & Wicklund, 1989). Indeed, a bandwagon effect exists as consumers aspire to conform to the affluent higher echelon or distinguish oneself from non-affluent lower social class via reinforcing a status distinction (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; Midgley, 1983; Sirgy, 1982; Veblen, 1899).

Social status demonstration is considered an aspect of conspicuous consumption, since the conspicuousness of product use is a moderator of self-concept and status portrayal (Mehta, 1999). It has been conceded that possession of particular products, combined with the mode of consumption used, may symbolise status (Bell, Holbrook, & Solomon, 1991; Packard, 1959). Conspicuous consumption consists of purchases of status-laden products, coupled with the ostentatious display of affluence as a social symbol (Mason, 1981), where such evidence confers a prestigious position (self-image) in the status stratum (O'cass & Frost, 2002). While status consumption is behavioural propensity to acquire products that provide status to the user, enhancement of one's self-image is exclusive to individuals who publicly demonstrate the status product to signal their status to significant others (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

Status, affluence, and success are symbolic cues linked to luxury goods (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004), and ascend from the perceived exclusivity and premium pricing that infer the relative affluence of individuals (Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993). A preference exists towards luxury goods that serve as an indicator of affluence in conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Individuals acquire luxury goods as they seek to conform to the consumption patterns of their reference group, which in general is the upper ranks of the social hierarchy (Hudders, 2012). Such phenomenon is referred as the 'bandwagon effect' (Leibenstein, 1950). The social ranking function of bandwagon luxury consumption leads to popular, renowned luxury goods signalling status, as individuals acquire a product based on the inference that the majority of high-status consumers own it (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Mandel, Petrova, & Cialdini, 2006). In line with this notion, the conspicuousness of a product has been positively linked to its susceptibility to the influence of reference groups (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Mason, 1981). Such a finding reinforces the 'bandwagon effect', since individuals observe the possessions used by their reference group, and accordingly, seek to purchase that product as well.

Apart from the external (social) facet of one's self-concept, self-identity value denotes one's internal (private) aspect that relates to self-perception (Mehta, 1999; Sirgy & Johar, 1999). The moderating effect of self-image congruity on the interaction between product-user image is widely accepted in consumer behaviour theory (Belk, 1988). Self-congruity elicits a significant influence on luxury brand purchases (Puntoni, 2001). Individuals leverage the value-expressive function of luxury goods to integrate values and attitudes into their own self-identity (Holt, 1995; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), or use luxury goods to maintain and improve their identity (Dittmar, 1994). Since luxury products can aid self-expression, individuals acquire luxuries for the communicative power to signal facets of their identity (such as, achievement and success) to others, even if their resultant self-identity is not in line with the expectations of the reference group (Wiedmann et al., 2009; Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). Hence, expressive motives elucidate on luxury consumption behaviour, regarding the proclivity to signal information on the self-concept and impress those significant others (Hudders, 2012).

## **2.5 MODERATING ROLE OF PRODUCT TYPE ON ONLINE REVIEWS**

### **2.5.1 Product Type and Review Valence**

#### ***2.5.1.1 Utilitarian and Hedonic Goods***

Several studies have investigated the mediating role of hedonic versus utilitarian products on the effect of review valence (Sen & Lerman, 2007). A clear distinction exists between the product characteristics of utilitarian and hedonic products (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). While consumption of utilitarian goods is driven by functional product attributes, hedonic goods are multisensory and elicit connotations of pleasure, fun and excitement (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Consumer judgement regarding utilitarian products is goal-orientated, cognitively-driven, and seeks to achieve a functional task (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). When evaluating hedonic products, however, consumers tend to ascribe greater weight to hedonic attributes or aspects of consumption than to tangible features (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). According to Singer (1966), imaginative constructs of reality form the basis of hedonic consumption, since consumers do not form their evaluations on what they know to be reality but, instead, on what they desire reality to be (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

One explanation for the dissimilarities in consumption behaviour for hedonic and utilitarian products is the affect-confirmation theory postulated by Adaval (2001). A positive mood may be anticipated and expected by consumers when exposed to reviews for hedonic products, as they seek a product that will evoke a 'feel good' sentiment. Under the affect-confirmation process, consumers are expected to disregard any negative information for hedonic products due to inconsistency with

their current or anticipated mood. Adaval (2001) found empirical support for this notion, revealing that individuals who formed their product judgements on the basis of hedonic criteria, assigned greater weight to product information that was evaluative consistent with their mood state in product judgements, compared to when it is inconsistent with such feelings. However, such effects were not present when exposed to reviews for utilitarian products, as such functional considerations require a reasons-based evaluation.

Irrespective of mood, variations in consumers' decision-making process for utilitarian and hedonic goods shape the perceived usefulness of online reviews. In relation to review valence, Sen and Lerman (2007) found that consumers display a negativity bias when appraising utilitarian product reviews. Since negative information related to the tangible attributes of utilitarian products will indicate diminished utility; such inferences will be weighted heavily during product evaluation. Since utility maximisation is derived from tangible and objective criteria, consumers will be more reliant and trust evaluations from other consumers (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

Moreover, such moderating effects of product type are mediated by the reader's attributions about the reviewer motivations behind the review, which in turn shapes their attitude towards the review. Drawing on attribution theory (Folkes, 1988; Heider, 1958), Sen and Lerman (2007) found that readers make casual inferences regarding the reviewer's motives for posting an online review, which in turn forms their perceptions on the veracity of the sentiments expressed, and subsequently, such attributions lead them to adopt or discount the information in their decision-making. The findings revealed that readers attribute external, product related (vs. internal, non-product related) motives to reviewer's negative sentiments about utilitarian products (vs. hedonic products), which led consumers to perceive negative reviews to be more useful for utilitarian than hedonic products (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Regardless of the inference being accurate, such perceived causality shapes the subsequent response of the reader. Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) reported that when a recipient infers communicator biases in regards to accuracy in reporting and knowledge, which affects the persuasiveness of the message and the subsequent opinion change.

When a review is attributed to product-related reasons, consumers perceive the review information to be reliable, credible, and useful (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Previous research highlights that information perceived as credible is likely to elicit a greater influence on consumer behaviour (Zhang & Watts, 2008). That is, the evaluation of source credibility delineates the informational value expected to be provided (Cheung et al., 2008). Accordingly, consumers were more inclined to

consider online reviews for utilitarian products (vs. hedonic products) in their purchase decisions, indicating that online reviews are more persuasive for utilitarian products.

The prominent negativity bias for utilitarian products was not present in the case of hedonic products (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Such non-product related reviewer biases deteriorate trust perceptions for negative reviews which, in turn, curb the negativity effect for hedonic product reviews. Sen and Lerman (2007) found supportive evidence of positivity bias, since consumers were more likely to discount than value negative hedonic product reviews. Individuals are potentially able to counter-argue the negative reviews effectively due to idiosyncratic nature of affective experiences pertaining to hedonic products (Adaval, 2001). A greater scepticism towards hedonic product reviews, derived from individuals having strong 'prior' expectations about the product, and accordingly, they are predisposed to engage in consistency bias in which they counter-argue such negative reviews or discount it, rather than be influenced by it (Ahluwalia, 2000).

Consumer attitudes towards hedonic products tend to be moderately positive and, accordingly, they exhibit a positive predisposition which can offset the negativity effect (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Since individuals have a desire or anticipation for pleasure, and consequently, they may be more inclined to positively evaluate the product (Kunda, 1990). As such, consumers may engage in affect-confirmation bias by assigning greater weight to the attribute information that is evaluated in a manner consistent with their mood (i.e. tends to be positive) than when it is inconsistent (Adaval, 2001). Consistent with these findings from Adaval (2001), Ahluwalia (2000) reported that when presented with negative dissonant information, a committed individual is likely to minimise the influence of such negative information when it is easily refuted.

#### ***2.5.1.2 Search and Experience Goods***

Search and experience goods are one of the most studied duos in extant research, investigating the influence of product characteristics on review valence effects (Cui et al., 2012; Hao, Ye, Li, & Cheng, 2010; Weathers, Sharma, & Wood, 2007). Products can be broadly classified on a continuum of search, experience, or credence attributes (Darby & Karni, 1973; Nelson, 1970). More specifically, the differences between such attributes are: (1) for search attributes, individuals can acquire full information to evaluate these attributes prior to purchase; (2) for experience attributes, these prove difficult for consumers to evaluate before consumption, often appraised during consumption; and (3) for credence attributes, consumer cannot verify these attributes even after usage (Darby & Karni, 1973; Hsieh, Chiu, & Chiang, 2005). Accordingly, these differences in product characteristics affect the approach individuals use to evaluate products, since performance uncertainty is more prevalent

for the latter attributes which are more ambiguous in nature (Weathers et al., 2007; Wright & Lynch, 1995).

Compelled by uncertainty and a limited knowledge base on experience attributes, individuals are more reliant on product evaluations and sentiments of others when considering experience products as opposed to search products (Park & Lee, 2009; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Weathers et al., 2007). A notion with empirical support from Park and Lee (2009), who found that online reviews have a greater influence on experience than search goods. According to Bone (1995), when judgemental criteria are ambiguous or product quality proves difficult to evaluate, then consumers assign greater weight to available information in product evaluations. Similar to utilitarian and hedonic goods, individuals evaluate the explicit attributes of a search product via a systematic decision-making process, however, when appraising an experience product their focus is directed to attribute-irrelevant heuristic cues, specifically, product popularity (Cui et al., 2012).

Several studies have found that consumers are difficult to convince on experience products, due to the subjectivity of individual judgements on intangible product attributes. In comparison to search attributes, in which full information can be easily acquired via secondary sources, experience attributes require verification through first-hand subjective experience (Wright & Lynch, 1995). Research on advertising claims found that consumers perceive claims about search goods as more credible than those for experience goods (Ford, Smith, & Swasy, 1990; Wright & Lynch, 1995). A field study from Yang and Mai (2010) reported similar findings, where individuals perceived existing user reviews on search attributes as more credible than experience attributes. Further supporting this notion, Weathers et al. (2007) found that despite product information being provided by different sources, the retailer or an independent third party, there was no variation in performance uncertainty for experience goods.

Several studies indicate that product type, in conjunction with review valence, has a moderating influence on product judgements (Cui et al., 2012; Pan & Chiou, 2011). Consensus in extant research exists, that review valence is more influential on evaluations and purchase decisions for search goods (vs. experience goods). A theory with empirical support from Cui et al. (2012), reporting the valence of reviews has a stronger positive effect on the sales of search products, while the number of reviews is more influential to experience products. Such persuasive effects are present for search products, since review valence imposes a direct implication on the ability of search attributes to maximise functional utility. These findings were partially supported by Hao et al. (2010), who indicated that positive reviews elicited a greater influence on search goods than for experience

goods, although there was no significant differences in the effects of negative reviews. Balanced reviews were found to elicit a more influential effect on experience goods than extreme reviews, which is attributed to the nature of experience attributes being more susceptible to individual-level differences (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Pan and Chiou (2011) found that negative reviews regarding experience goods, rather than credence goods, were perceived to be more trustworthy.

### **2.5.2 Product Type and Review Volume**

Another avenue of literature has focused on the moderating role of product characteristics on the saliency of review volume effects (Cui et al., 2012; Duan et al., 2008a). An established notion in information processing theory, mentions the propensity of individuals to show increased dependency on extrinsic cues rather than intrinsic cues, when product quality proves difficult to evaluate (Zeithaml, 1988). Consistent with this notion, Cui et al. (2012) found that review volume had a greater positive impact on sales of experience products than that of search products. Since experience goods are assessed on affective evaluative cues, such evaluations are naturally subjective, idiosyncratic and less indicative of product quality. Intuitively, individuals direct their attention to heuristic cues, particularly, product popularity as signalled by the number of reviews available to evaluate experience products (Huang, Lurie, & Mitra, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014a; Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010b). Similar findings were reported by Duan et al. (2008a), who also indicated that experience products are subject to the influence of the number of reviews, materialising from its function as an indicator of product popularity and an awareness effect from the absolute volume of reviews. These studies provide affirmatory evidence of the mediating effect of product characteristics on the influence of review volume on subsequent purchase intention.

Product popularity represents a social cue that alleviates perceived risk (DeSarbo, Kim, Choi, & Spaulding, 2002), where product acquisition is associated with social benefits, such as group affiliation and conformity to referent group norms (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). In the same vein, the herding literature advised that following the crowd sometimes represents the optimal choice for consumers (Banerjee, 1992; Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, & Welch, 1992). Moreover, Park and Kim (2008a) found that individuals with low expertise rely on peripheral cues. As such, the number of reviews was more influential on the purchase intentions of low expertise consumers (vs. high expertise). Drawing on the elaboration likelihood model, the researchers elucidate that consumers with low expertise rely on peripheral cues such as the signal of product popularity, since they are persuaded by the simple intuition that 'lots of messages are good' (Park & Kim, 2008a; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Consumers are less susceptible to the persuasion of content-related review dimensions (i.e. review valence, argument quality) in hedonic consumption, since reviewers use subjective judgement to evaluate hedonic products (Cheema & Papatla, 2010; Zhang et al., 2014a). Similarly, Sen and Lerman (2007) found that negative reviews for hedonic products were attributed to the reviewer biases, and as a result considered to be less useful. Given the subjective nature of product attributes and limited expertise, consumers are more likely to consult extrinsic cues to evaluate luxury products.

Although limited research exists on review volume and luxury products, there has been a focus on reviewer motives to generate luxury product reviews. Cheema and Kaikati (2010) contended that reviewers with a 'need for uniqueness' may be reluctant to share information and recommend luxury products, in order to safeguard the sense of prestige and exclusivity. Accordingly, a similar response may be evoked from consumers towards luxury products with a high volume of reviews, where the perceived luxury value linked to exclusivity and elitist connotations is diminished (Dubois & Laurent, 1994).

## **2.6 LITERATURE GAP AND JUSTIFICATION**

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2.1 synthesized insights from the literature review to guide the current study. The figure illustrates the main relationships that exist between the three independent variables, review valence (positive/ negative), review volume (high/ low) and product type (non-luxury/ mid-luxury/ high-luxury), and how each construct is instrumental in affecting consumer purchase behaviour, as discussed in the literature. Extant research provides theoretical and empirical evidence for these interactions, where review valence (Lee & Koo, 2012; Park et al., 2007; Sen & Lerman, 2007) and review volume (Park & Kim, 2008b; Park & Lee, 2008) metrics of online reviews elicit differential effects on purchase behaviour; the research on the interaction effect of the latter two constructs (e.g., review consensus and conformity pressures) (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013; Khare et al., 2011); and evidence to support the influential effect of luxury products on consumer behaviour (Han et al., 2010; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

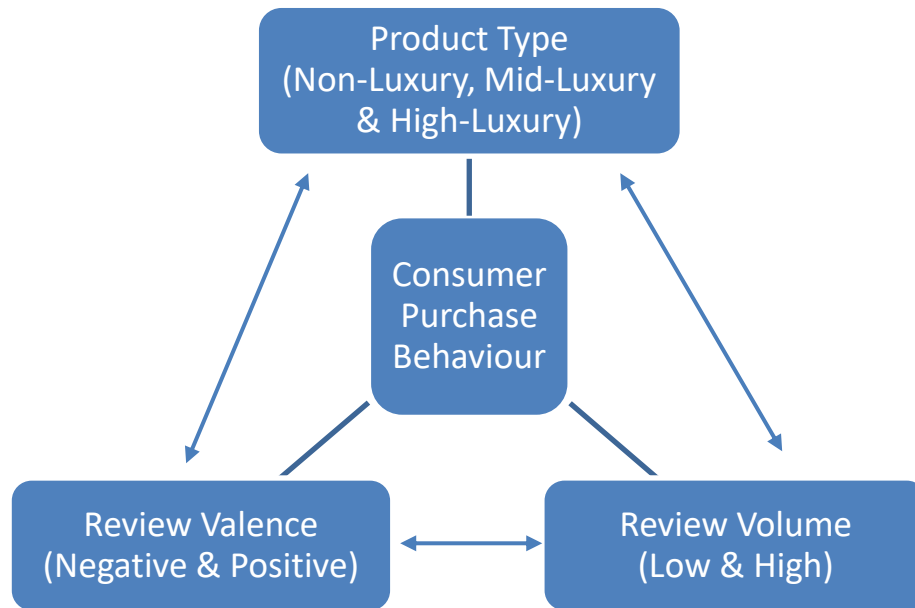
As mentioned previously, the moderating role of product characteristics has received attention in extant electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature, however, this research has largely focused on the influence of online reviews pertaining to search versus experience products (Cui et al., 2012; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Park & Lee, 2009), experience versus credence goods (Pan & Chiou, 2011), and hedonic versus utilitarian products (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Sen & Lerman, 2007). However, minimal knowledge exists about the dynamics of product-luxury perceptions affecting the influence

of online reviews, which constitutes a critical point of understanding luxury consumption in an online context. Thus, the conceptual framework in Figure 2.1 grounds product type within a three-way interaction in a larger progression of behavioural responses to online reviews. The normative and informational antecedents of purchase behaviour derived from review valence and review volume influences for non-luxury, mid-luxury, and high-luxury.

Research on luxury products and online reviews from a receiver viewpoint is somewhat scarce, where a prominent focus has been on reviewer motives to generate luxury product reviews (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013). The connection between product-luxury perceptions (product type) and online review dimensions (i.e., review valence, review volume) has been largely unexplored in current literature and as far as this research has been able to determine, there exists a single piece of academic research that indicates that review valence interacts with non-luxury and luxury products to affect consumer attention differently (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). Moreover, a recent meta-analysis by You et al. (2015) identified that future research is needed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the moderating role of commodity and luxury products on the eWOM effect. Furthermore, they highlighted the need to determine the eWOM metric (volume or valence) that plays a more significant role in generating sales for luxury products.

As outlined in the literature review, each of the three constructs elicits an influence on consumer behaviour, and as such, each co-exists and influences one another. While the linkage effects of purchase behaviour and review valence or review volume have been addressed sufficiently, Figure 2.1 highlights a lack of knowledge regarding the moderating effect of brand-luxury perceptions on the eWOM effectiveness of review valence and review volume on purchase behaviour. Accordingly, this study aims to address this research gap, as identified by You et al. (2015), that exists in the understanding of whether or not manipulated levels of product luxury, review valence and review volume interact and effect consumer purchase behaviour. Hence, the results derived from this research will make an important contribution to present knowledge by filling the existing research gap.





**Figure 2.1: Linkage between Key Research Concepts**

## 2.7 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

### 2.7.1 Hypothesis One: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Informative Value

Perceived informative value is used as a measure of the general perceptions regarding information quality related characteristics of online reviews (Ducoffe, 1996; Zhang et al., 2014a). A content-related dimension that establishes the informant role of online reviews (Park et al., 2007) and also contributes to argument quality, a validated predictor of consumer behavioural intention (Zhang et al., 2014a). Receivers may form judgements about the perceived informativeness as a function of review valence, derived from differences in causal attributes for positive and negative reviews. Negative reviews are more attributed to the product experience (vs. reviewer) than positive reviews, and as a result are considered to be more informative (Chen & Lurie, 2013; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Furthermore, the scarce and novel nature of negative information makes it more diagnostic when appraising product quality (Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Fiske, 1980).

Individuals may refer to heuristic cues to facilitate their decision-making, a large number of reviews represents a greater quantity of product information which can lead consumers to further perceive review arguments to be more informative (Zhang et al., 2014a). When individuals attempt to process and elaborate on all information available, however, they are likely to experience cognitive strain as information overload starts to materialise, which in turn erodes the perceived informativeness of the review set (Park & Lee, 2008).

The informativeness of the online reviews can be described as the perceived ability of the information to provide an improved understanding and knowledge of product quality and performance, an aptitude that ensures a reliable evaluation of target product. An outcome dependent on product type, for instance, individuals are more sceptical of product claims pertaining to experience goods compared to search goods (Franke, Huhmann, & Mothersbaugh, 2004; Weathers et al., 2007). Such scepticism arises, at least in part, from the idiosyncratic nature of product usage. Jiménez and Mendoza (2013) found supportive evidence of the notion that detailed reviews for experience goods are not diagnostic, since consumers expect high variance across individual experiences with the target product. Similar results were found for utilitarian and hedonic products (Sen & Lerman, 2007), where product reviews were considered more useful for function-driven utilitarian goods than for pleasure-driven hedonic goods based on reviewer attributions. For this current study, the non-luxury product is evaluated on objective criteria (i.e. functional utility) in product sentiments which are likely to enhance informative value. However, similar to experience goods, the luxury value of products is based on subjective criteria whereby supplemental information is not overly useful in uncertainty reduction.

Based on these intuitions, it is expected that review valence, review volume and product type will exhibit an influential effect on the perceived informative value of the review set. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>1</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Perceived Informative Value**

### **2.7.2 Hypothesis Two: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Persuasiveness**

Perceived persuasiveness is used as a measure of a consumer's overall perceptions relating to the strength of persuasiveness engrained in online reviews (Zhang et al., 2014a; Zhang, 1996). Under the recommender role, the quality of persuasive reviews is determined by two content-related dimensions: review valence and argument strength (Lee & Xia, 2011). Persuasive reviews advise consumers with strong causality/ argumentation and enable them to follow convincing recommendations (Zhang et al., 2014a). Consumers evaluate review persuasiveness based on content characteristics, particularly, the valence of product information. As aforementioned in the literature review, there has been equivocal findings regarding the persuasive effects of review valence. While agreement exists that positively- and negatively-framed online reviews elicit asymmetric effects, the prevailing contention is that negative reviews exert stronger effects than positive reviews (Fiske, 1980; Mizerski, 1982; Park & Lee, 2009; Yang & Mai, 2010). Intuitively, the

salience of the review valence effect on review persuasiveness is likely to be moderated by product type (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Zhang et al., 2010a).

Previous studies have highlighted the mediating role of product type on the persuasive effect of review characteristics (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Sen & Lerman, 2007). An interactive effect between review valence and product type is expected, where review valence is more persuasive for non-luxury than luxury products. Given the objective nature of product characteristics, Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) found that consumers devoted more attention to non-luxury reviews, especially negative reviews as it was considered a threat to the potential functional utility. In the case of luxury brands, however, these attention-related differences were non-significant. Similar results regarding the perceived persuasiveness of review valence across product type are expected in the current study.

The persuasive effect of review valence can be enhanced by the number of reviews available. A study from Lee et al. (2008a) found empirical evidence of a negativity effect becoming more prominent on product attitudes as the proportion of negative reviews increased. Hence, the saliency of group opinion increases as a direct function of review volume, where individuals feel more compelled to conform as a result of greater normative influence elicited by larger reference group (Campbell & Fairey, 1989). Based on prior research, it is expected that review valence, review volume and product type aspects of online reviews will interact to affect perceived persuasiveness.

**H<sub>2</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Perceived Persuasiveness**

### **2.7.3 Hypothesis Three: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on eWOM Effect**

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) effect focuses on the general influence of online information on consumer decision-making. Message characteristics of online reviews have salient effects, specifically, Park and Lee (2009) found that information direction, website reputation and product type contribute to the eWOM effect. Indeed, online review configurations affect the eWOM effect. However, it is important to establish the extent to which determinants of eWOM effect elicit significant differences, which enlightens the mechanisms of influence on decision-making processes. In regards to review valence, Park and Lee (2009) found that negatively-framed reviews to elicit a greater eWOM effect than positively-framed reviews. Product type, experience and search goods, was validated as a moderator of the information direction-eWOM effect interaction (Park & Lee, 2009). In relation to non-luxury and luxury manipulations, it is expected that the negativity effect will

be augmented in the case of luxury products. Given the ease of defining the utilitarian and functional attributes of non-luxury products, consumers are likely to possess a detailed cognitive structure of knowledge for these products compared to the luxury counterpart. Hence, similar to experience goods, luxury products are expected to sustain a greater eWOM negativity effect, due to negative reviews magnifying a prevalent uncertainty that originates from their limited knowledge base. The subjective nature of product sentiments, however, may compel consumers to overlook review valence and devote their attention to heuristic cues when evaluating luxury goods, where product popularity inferences are related to review volume (Cui et al., 2012). Either way, it is expected that a three-way interaction effect will produce an impact on eWOM effect.

**H<sub>3</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on eWOM Effect**

#### **2.7.4 Hypothesis Four: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards Reviews**

Attitude towards reviews was used to ascertain the perceived evaluative accuracy of online reviews as a reliable indicator of product quality. Such a dependent measure was important, since attitude is positively related to the acceptance of information and its resultant role in decision-making. Information credibility can reduce the perceived risk associated with a purchase decision, enhancing the reader's attitude towards the review and their intention to adopt the review content (Chang & Wu, 2014).

Reviewers considered as having expressed a bias or insufficient knowledge may exacerbate risk perceptions. Hence, the validity of a message is assessed based on information credibility judgements that can be derived from review attributions (Chang & Wu, 2014). A study from Sen and Lerman (2007) indicated that reader attributions about the reviewer's motives behind posting an online review was an antecedent that shaped their attitude towards the review. Product type was found to mediate such effects, specifically; negative sentiments expressed for hedonic (vs. utilitarian) products were attributed to the reviewer's internal, subjective reasons (vs. external, product-related reasons), which diminished the perceived usefulness of the review. Such casual inferences regarding reviewer motivations affect message persuasiveness (Eagly et al., 1978), which in turn affects the resultant attitudes and behaviours of the reader (Folkes, 1988). Accordingly, online reviews attributed to internal, self-serving motives of the reviewer, the message credibility is discounted, and therefore, the negativity effect of hedonic product reviews was absent (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Overall, consumers exhibited a more positive attitude towards reviews for utilitarian products (than hedonic goods) in their purchase decision-making. Based on the discussion above, it

is expected that a review valence and product type interaction effect will play an important role in the formation of attitudes towards the reviews in the current study.

**H<sub>5</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Information Adoption**

### **2.7.5 Hypothesis Five: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Information Adoption**

Information adoption is used as a measure to determine the extent to which individuals are influenced to adopt the advice that they receive from online reviews. Based on information adoption theory (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), the assessment of information usefulness has a mediating role between influence processes and information adoption (Davis, 1989). If individuals have no intention to accept the received advice into their decision-making, then no effect is incurred despite their exposure to the negative/positive online reviews. Hence, information adoption is a pivotal antecedent to predict the negative/ positive eWOM effects (Gershoff et al., 2003), as it alludes to the receiver's willingness and intention to rely on such information in their decision-making. Prior research has alluded to review valence and the number of reviews as antecedents of information usefulness (Chang & Wu, 2014; Filieri, 2015; Lee & Koo, 2012). The diagnosticity of received advice, however, varies under different processing conditions.

Credible information has a greater likelihood of acceptance into decision-making (Cheung et al., 2009), where casual attributions form the receiver preferences by mediating risk perceptions and shape their subsequent intention to adopt the information (Chang & Wu, 2014). Individuals tend to accord weight to negative information more heavily than positive information (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011), since it is perceived to be more useful and diagnostic, and as a result wields a greater influence over purchase decisions (Liu, Wang, & Wu, 2010). Furthermore, review volume can support the effect of valence and provide consensus information (Khare et al., 2011). However, Park and Lee (2008) found that a large number of online reviews can stimulate the onset of information overload, which in turn exacerbates the perceived informativeness of the review set.

Online reviews tend to use objective or subjective information to evaluate the focal product. Previous studies have indicated that individuals elicit a distinct preference for objective information in their online information search (Klein & Ford, 2003; Lee & Koo, 2012). In relation to product type, Sen and Lerman (2007) found that negative reviews for hedonic products were attributed to the reviewer biases, and subsequently, considered to be less useful. Given the subjective nature of product attributes, online reviews for hedonic products are likely to be idiosyncratic and reflective of

subjective judgement, consequently, these sentiments are less informative about product quality (Sen & Lerman, 2007). For the same reason, Pan and Zhang (2011) found that online reviews for experimental products are considered as less helpful than those for utilitarian products. Indeed, objective information is used to describe tangible attributes of utilitarian products is easily understood and measured with objectivity, and therefore, can alleviate the perceived risk associated with the purchase decision. Lee and Koo (2012) found that individuals perceive online reviews with objective information as more credible than those with subjective information.

A receiver who adopts a message will accept the information and incorporate it into decision-making, which leads to subsequent attitude change or purchase intentions, where such outcomes indicate the effectiveness of online reviews. For that reason, information adoption is a relevant dependent measure to include in this current research. Based on this intuition, these are means in which review characteristics (review valence and volume) and situational aspects (product type) can affect perceptions of information usefulness, which in turn can influence the information adoption process (Filieri, 2015).

**H<sub>5</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Information Adoption**

#### **2.7.6 Hypothesis Six: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards Product**

Within the eWOM literature, several studies have investigated the influence of online reviews on consumer product attitude (Lee et al., 2008a). Attitude towards the Product was used to measure an individual's overall evaluation of the target product after exposure to online reviews (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). The elaboration likelihood model provides insight into the persuasive effect of information attributes for prompting change in product attitudes and for enhancing the strength of these attitudes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Attitude towards the product is an important dependent measure, since attitude is strongly and positively related to subsequent purchase intent (Kim & Hunter, 1993).

Online reviews have been empirically proven to influence attitude formation, particularly in the case of negative information (Herr et al., 1991; Huang, Hsiao, & Chen, 2012). Since consumers may lack adequate information on a product, online reviews offer a source of pertinent information to minimise uncertainty and evade incongruities between anticipated and actual product performance (Bone, 1995). Therefore, online reviews are expected to strongly influence attitude when individuals confront less familiar products. Review valence elicits asymmetric effects on product attitude, where

a positive relationship exists between information direction and product attitude (Huang et al., 2012). In addition, online reviews perceived as diagnostic will lead individuals to accord a larger weight to such information when forming their product attitude (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Herr et al., 1991).

Moreover, the volume of reviews may induce a conformity effect, as the online reviews show a prevalent opinion that establishes a group norm and individuals exhibit a tendency to comply with normative behaviour (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). A large number of online reviews in consensus lead individuals to deduce the same choice, in order to minimise perceived risk associated with purchase decision (Lee et al., 2008a). The interpersonal nature of online reviews has the propensity to affect consumer attitudes. Moreover, Lee et al. (2008a) indicated that as the volume of negative reviews increases, a more prevalent perception of purchase risk is induced in conformity with others, which in turn leads to a less favourable product attitude.

Previous studies recognised that the product characteristics moderate the influence of online reviews on product attitudes, for instance, hedonic versus utilitarian goods (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013), and search versus experience goods (Lee et al., 2008a). Based on previous research, it is deduced that, the review valence, review volume and product type aspects of online reviews will interact to affect the attitude towards the product.

**H<sub>6</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Attitude towards the Product**

#### **2.7.7 Hypothesis Seven: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards Brand**

Attitude towards brand was an evaluative measure used to determine an “individual’s internal evaluation of the brand” after reading the online reviews (Mitchell & Olson, 1981, p. 318). The luxury products feature a visually displayed brand name, and therefore, it is important to determine the imputation of goodness/ badness attached to the attitudinal brand after exposure to the review set. The consequent brand attitude will presumably motivate and direct consumer behaviour (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Prior research indicates that review valence has an effect on brand attitude (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015; Lee et al., 2009). Intuitively, a positive relationship exists between review valence and brand attitude. However, the negativity effect had a disproportionately larger effect on brand attitudes than positive reviews (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015; Floh et al., 2013). An extremity effect of review valence exists, where extremely positive and negative reviews are more influential than

moderate reviews, providing clear implications for consumers that negate or encourage purchase behaviour (Lee et al., 2009). In regards to product type, this current study used actual brands to operationalise different luxury connotations; accordingly, such brand awareness is coupled with individuals' having their own prior perceptions of the brand and associated luxuriousness. Note that, the degree of perceived luxuriousness is expected to offset the negativity effect of review valence, as the 'luxury' evokes positive preferences and attitudes for the product (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Accordingly, it is anticipated that review valence, review volume and product type will have a significant influence on the formation of consumer attitudes towards the brand.

**H<sub>7</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Attitude towards Brand**

### **2.7.8 Hypothesis Eight: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Conspicuous Consumption**

Conspicuous consumption value is used as a measure of the value derived from an innate desire to portray a self-image through the overt consumption of the product to communicate status to others (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Individuals consume conspicuously based on the premise that evidence of affluence increases the likelihood of ascending the social status hierarchy. Hence, there is a potential for individuals to exhibit preferences in acquiring status products that signal a prestigious (self-image) position in the status stratum (O'cass & Frost, 2002). As such, conspicuous consumption value is anticipated to increase as a direct function of the relative strength of product luxury appeals.

Review valence is an influential social cue, individuals aspire to conspicuously consume status brands to gain the recognition, approval, or acceptance of a reference group (O'cass & Frost, 2002). Accordingly, negative reviews indicate social disapproval, and as a result a lower conspicuous consumption value is attributed to the product. Individuals observe the online reviews and control their expressive behaviour, either to maintain or adjust their self-presentation depending on social cues, which trigger situationally appropriate behaviour (Gould, 1993). In the case of a positively reviewed product, consumers accord a high conspicuous consumption value where product type is a mediator such positivity effects.

Based on such intuition, it is expected that review valence, review volume and product type interact to serve expressive motives that has an influential effect on the respective conspicuous consumption value.



**H<sub>8</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Conspicuous Consumption**

### **2.7.9 Hypothesis Nine: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Status Consumption**

As a separate, yet related, construct to the latter, status consumption is also a behavioural tendency associated with luxury products (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Status consumption value, as a dependent measure, is indicative of the degree to which acquisition and usage of the product is perceived to provide status to an individual. Such value materialises from use of a status-laden product that signifies a desirable social position of esteem or privilege due to its superior positioning in the product category (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Status products often have a higher perceived luxury, quality, or prestige ascribed to them and its consumption (O'cass & Frost, 2002). Indeed, the high-luxury condition of the product type manipulation is positioned in the upper-tier of the luxury market, which reinforces elitist, exclusive and prestige connotations. A premium price ensures the product remains exclusive to the higher echelon (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The aspirational image of social standing gains esteem from others as it symbolises affluence to others. The contention in previous studies is that such products are acquired to indicate social prestige (Eastman et al., 1999; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Eastman, 1996). Hence, it is expected that the high-luxury condition is accorded the utmost status consumption value, followed by mid-luxury, and then non-luxury product condition.

Products positioned to maintain exclusivity signal prestige (Zinkhan & Prenshaw, 1994). Since status connotations are reinforced by the 'snob effects' of luxury consumption (Leibenstein, 1950), a low number of online reviews is inferred as a few owning the product which in turn reinforces exclusivity connotations that is indicative of a high status consumption value. The importance of these review characteristics shapes the following proposed hypothesis:

**H<sub>9</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Status Consumption**

### **2.7.10 Hypothesis Ten: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Need for Uniqueness**

Need for uniqueness (NFU), a recipient characteristic, is used as a measure of the value derived from the product regarding the extent to which an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others is satisfied (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001, p. 1). An individual's desire to be different discloses the manner in which they will respond to or exert social influences. A high NFU incites a reluctance to post online reviews due to concern over diminishing their exclusivity (Cheema &

Kaikati, 2010), paired with a resistance to the influence of word-of-mouth from others to preserve their uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001). A high NFU manifests through an individual's willingness to make unpopular choices (unpopular choice counterconformity), attempts to be different (creative choice counterconformity), and their avoidance of similarity (popular choice counterconformity) (Tian et al., 2001).

In the online review context, perceived social influence is a direct function of the number of reviews. When individuals perceive social influence to be potent (i.e. high volume of reviews), regardless of the positive- or negative-framing of reviews, those with a high NFU are likely to be predisposed to resist its influence. A study from Khare et al. (2011) found supportive evidence of this notion, reporting a significant interaction between review valence, review volume and NFU. Specifically, the review volume and review valence interaction has a significant effect when NFU is low, however, insignificant when it is high. When an individual has a low NFU, a high volume of reviews evokes a valence-accentuating effect. As such, compared to the low volume condition, a high volume of reviews exacerbates the negative preferences/ attitude for a negatively-rated product, while enhancing the positive preferences shown towards a positively-rated product (Khare et al., 2011). However, such interaction effects are not present for a high NFU. Indeed, those with a high NFU are resistant to the conformity pressures of the assimilative sway of high volume, and therefore, are unaffected by valence-accentuating effects salient for those with a low NFU who conform to the persuasive and dissuasive social influences.

In relation to product type, individuals are likely to associate high-luxury products with a high NFU value due to its ability to evoke exclusivity connotations (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). The latter notion is reinforced by Snyder and Fromkin (1977), who found the functional value of uniqueness, ascending from the perceived exclusivity of a product, will support an individual's need for uniqueness. The mid-luxury condition is a mass-consumed luxury product, and therefore, a lower NFU value is expected as consumers seek to dissociate themselves from the 'common herd'. Zhan and He (2012) found that individuals evaluate 'best-known', popular brands more negatively, when uniqueness-seeking is a more prominent goal. Non-luxury products are also expected to have a low NFU value due to the affordable, accessible and standardized aesthetic of the product. Although any predetermined product perceptions are expected to be challenged by the online review set, and accordingly, it is hypothesised that:

**H<sub>10</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Need for Uniqueness**

### **2.7.11 Hypothesis Eleven: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Social Value**

Social value is used as a measure to determine the perceived utility derived from the product's aptitude to enhance one's social self-concept (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Social value is a primary driver of luxury consumption, as individuals seek to acquire luxury goods may enhance their social identity and serve as a symbolic marker of group membership (Belk, 1988; Vickers & Renand, 2003; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). In regards to product type, it is expected that individuals will accord greater social value to luxury products that confer esteem upon the product user and allow them to conform to the norms of a higher echelon. An overt display of the product has social implications. Review valence influences this social-adjustive function of luxury consumption, where negatively evaluated products are associated with social risk. Accordingly, individuals are likely to evade product usage due to potential negative repercussion, such as the negative connotations being conferred onto their social self-concept (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993). The associative social signalling value is expected to be greater for products with positive reviews.

Bandwagon effects are likely to be reinforced by a high number of online reviews, as perceptions of product popularity trigger further demand (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Individuals may exhibit a motivational impetus to acquire a popular product, in order to leverage the social capital arising from a symbolic affiliation with the reference group (Tynan et al., 2010). A greater social value is derived from a popular product, as consumers observe the consumption behaviour of others and infer that it is a prestigious and must-have product (Leibenstein, 1950). Based on these results, it is predicted, that a combination of review valence and review volume will exhibit a significant effect on social value, where product type plays a mediating role.

**H<sub>11</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Social Value**

### **2.7.12 Hypothesis Twelve: Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Purchase Intention**

Within the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature, purchase intentions are used as a measure of consumer response to online reviews and as a eWOM effectiveness variable (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013; Park et al., 2007). Specifically, Spears and Singh (2004, p. 56) describe purchase intentions as *"an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand/ product"*. Previous research has found review valence to influence consumer purchase behaviour (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). A study from Zhu and Zhang (2010) extended this approach,

indicating that a large number of positive reviews affects purchase intention, since the perceived reviewer consensus makes the information appear trustworthy and credible. Such findings are linked to review volume, reinforce the notion that individuals rely on the “wisdom of the crowd” as a heuristic cue to infer accurate judgement (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013).

Regardless of information direction, a high number of online reviews has a positive effect on purchase intentions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Park et al., 2007). Given that review volume often taken a signal of product popularity, where a rational inference is made that the number of reviews is linked to the sales volume of the product (Chatterjee, 2001). Reference to online reviews is engaged in to alleviate risk exposure (Buttle, 1998), and as a result a greater number of online reviews indicates a popular product and minimizes perceived risk.

Previous studies have recognised the differential effects of review valence on purchase intentions as mediated by product type, for instance, search and experience goods (Huang et al., 2009; Park & Lee, 2009), hedonic and utilitarian products (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Park and Lee (2009) found negative online reviews to have a greater influence on purchase intentions for experience than search goods. In relation to utilitarian products, negative reviews are perceived as more useful than positive ones (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Furthermore, consumers are more dependent on extrinsic cues, such as review volume as an indicator of product popularity, when product quality proves difficult to evaluate (Zeithaml, 1988). Accordingly, Cui et al. (2012) found that review volume exerts a greater influence on product sales of experience than search goods. Based on this intuition, product type moderates the effect of review valence and review volume on purchase intention, which leads to the proceeding hypothesis:

**H<sub>12</sub>: Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type will have a significant effect on Purchase Intention**

## **2.8 COVARIATES**

The confounding effects of three covariate variables are accounted for when analysing the hypothesised relationships. The potential effects of these variables on the dependent variable are discussed below, and subsequently controlled, to ensure the actual effect size of the independent variables is established.

### **2.8.1 Product Involvement**

The first covariate is Product Involvement refers to “*a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests*” (Zaichowsky, 1985, p. 342). Product Involvement mediates the influence of the Review Volume and Review Valence dimensions during information

processing (Gupta & Harris, 2010; Lee & Lee, 2009; Lee et al., 2008a; Pan & Chiou, 2011; Park & Lee, 2008). Drawing on the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), previous research highlights that the level of involvement directs the focus of attention and relative importance placed on Review Valence and Review Volume in processing the review set. As such, high-involvement consumers adopt a central route during information processing, where they are motivated to elaborate on the valence of persuasive arguments to evaluate the product; under the low-involvement condition, however, individuals process information with minimal effort via the peripheral route using heuristic cues such as product popularity as signalled by Review Volume (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Based on this intuition, Product Involvement will mediate the saliency of Review Valence and Review Volume effects, due to the relative weight placed on these review metrics during information processing, which in turn will shape eWOM effectiveness. Accordingly, Product Involvement is expected to exhibit an influence on the all dependent measures.

### 2.8.2 Materialism

The second covariate is Materialism, a concept defined by Belk (1984, p. 304) as the *“importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions”* and has been empirically proven to elicit a significant influence on consumer behaviour (Belk, 1984; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). A highly materialistic individual considers possessions to be high-priority (Belk, 1985), such emphasis is derived from the need to portray a positive impression (i.e., status and social standing) shaped by the symbolic meaning of the product (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Intuitively, high materialism reinforces an individual’s social and status consumption tendencies, which in turn is associated with self-concept enhancement (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). Hence, high-materialistic individuals attach greater importance to self-identity appeals, compared to those a low-materialistic predisposition, and are motivated to use luxury products to improve their self-image in the perception of significant others (Hudders, 2012). Materialism has been found to moderate an individual’s expressive and impressive motives to purchase luxury brands (Hudders, 2012). Accordingly, this research is concerned about the impact of materialistic traits on the evaluative process and purchase consideration. Materialism is predicted to influence the product-luxury perceptions of the manipulation of Product Type. It is expected that Conspicuous Consumption, Status Consumption and Social Value are affected by Materialism, as the weight placed on these outcomes is more salient for highly materialistic individuals.

### 2.8.3 Interpersonal Influence

The third covariate is Interpersonal Influence, a social-adjustive function defined as a *“tendency to conform to expectations of others”* (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989, p. 474). The trait of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) shows individual differences in compliance to social

influence. A high SNI motivates individuals to strive to gain approval in social situations via conformity to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, in order to acquire rewards, or evade punishments from others (Bearden et al., 1989). A positive linkage has been found for SNI and protective self-presentation (Wooten & Reed, 2004), which indicates that high-SNI consumers devote more effort into evading an undesirable impression. Accordingly, interpersonal influences have been found to mediate behaviour in luxury consumption (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Mason, 1981; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). A popular luxury product is associated with social benefits (e.g., group affiliation) (rewards) and minimise the likelihood of being perceived as member of low social classes (punishment), which reinforces conformity with referent group norms of high-status consumers in luxury consumption (Zhan & He, 2012). Hence, individual susceptibility to normative influence moderates the linkage between self-concept and luxury bandwagon behaviour (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

Additionally, high-SNI individuals place importance on socially conspicuous products (O'Cass, 2001). Specifically, such consumers engage in the overt display of status products to leverage the symbolic meaning in image portrayal, in order to be afflicted with, or enhance, their self-concept in the opinion of significant others. Intuitively, susceptibility to reference group influence (normative) has a direct positive influence on status and conspicuous consumption tendencies (Marcoux, Filiatrault, & Cheron, 1997; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Based on these relationships, it is expected that Interpersonal Influence will affect perceptions of the Product Type manipulations. Moreover, the relative weight accorded to Review Valence and Review Volume conditions are likely to be mediated by Interpersonal Influence during information processing. Such confounding effects are predicted to require adjustment for Attitude towards Product, Attitude towards Brand, Conspicuous Consumption, Status Consumption, Social Value and Purchase Intention dependent measures.

## 2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a theoretical background for the main areas of interest in the current study. Specifically, this chapter discussed information processing theory in the context of online reviews. This chapter also introduced the concept of review valence, providing an overview of the three arguments in extant research on the salience of review valence effects: negativity bias, positivity bias and non-effect. Followed by a discussion of review volume and its prevailing effects of information overload and signaling product popularity. This chapter also addressed the conceptualization of non-luxury and luxury goods, and indicated that discontinuity exists in perceived luxury across products. Luxury consumption was then discussed. Previous findings on the moderating role of product characteristics on the influence of review valence and review volume

were also included. Considerations of the extant literature formed the foundation in which the proposed dependence relationships were grounded, the research gap was identified and the hypothesised relationships were presented. Finally, the three covariates that were expected to influence the final results were discussed. The subsequent chapter discusses the development of the experimental stimuli and seeks to operationalise the three independent variables based on this conceptual groundwork.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used to test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter Two. First, this chapter will provide an overview of the research design, before further explaining the experimental design, detailing the development of the online webpage and the stimuli used to establish the experimental treatments. Subsequent sections discuss the questionnaire development and the pre-test carried out before the main data collection phase. Manipulation checks are verified along with a summary of the amendments made to the final experiment arising from pre-test results. Finally, this chapter covers the experimental procedure undertaken in this research.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Online consumer reviews present a source of product information that affects individual evaluations of the focal product and subsequent purchase intentions (e.g., Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013; Ketelaar et al., 2015). Notably, the influence of online reviews manifests in the persuasiveness of various review dimensions during information processing. Extant research has sought to understand the extent to which certain review dimensions are considered useful or diagnostic for decision-making purposes and, subsequently, the relative weight assigned to such product information. Review volume has been proven to exert influence on consumer judgement of products (Khare et al., 2011; Park & Lee, 2008; Zhang et al., 2014a), and high volume versus a low volume conditions are tested. That said, review valence is another construct that has been empirically proven to affect product evaluations (Lee et al., 2008a; Sen & Lerman, 2007) and, accordingly, the salience of positively- and negatively-framed information in a purchase decision is investigated.

Several studies have demonstrated the moderating role of product type on the effects of online reviews in purchase decisions, specifically hedonic versus utilitarian products (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009), search versus experience goods (Hao et al., 2010; Huang et al., 2009; Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013), and credence versus experience goods (Pan & Chiou, 2011). Such research indicates the moderating role of a product's characteristics and its associated consumption goals on how available information is processed and the perceived value of the review. In this vein, previous research contends that the existence of positivity versus negativity bias is dependent on the type of product being reviewed, as a result of the intrinsic differences in the nature of consumption linked to such goods, for instance, hedonic versus utilitarian goods (Adaval, 2001; Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The current study seeks to understand the response elicited by consumers towards online reviews pertaining to non-luxury, mid-luxury, and high-luxury products. Specifically,



the salience of review dimensions – review volume and review valence – in information processing, followed by the subsequent effects on consumer perception and inference formation for the focal product and the consequent purchase intentions.

Accordingly, these variable relationships were measured in context of online reviews using an experimental design.

## 3.2 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

This research utilised a 2x2x3 between-subjects factorial design to test the effects of Review Valence (Positive and Negative), Review Volume (High and Low), and Product Type (Non-Luxury, Mid-Luxury, and High-Luxury) on consumer purchase intentions. Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type were manipulated as independent variables to produce twelve unique experimental treatments (refer to Table 3.1).

<i>Product Type</i>	<i>Review Volume</i>					
	Non-Luxury	Mid-Luxury		High-Luxury		
<i>Review Valence</i>	Positive review x High volume	Positive review X Low volume	Positive review x High volume	Positive review X Low volume	Positive review x High volume	Positive review X Low volume
	Negative review x High volume	Negative review x Low volume	Negative review x High volume	Negative review x Low volume	Negative review x High volume	Negative review x Low volume

**Table 3.1: Experimental Manipulations**

## 3.3 STIMULI DEVELOPMENT

### 3.3.1 Considerations for Developing Review Webpage

The study used a simulated review webpage as the vehicle for the experimental manipulations. Previous studies addressing similar constructs have used an e-commerce retailer website on which to feature the online user-generated reviews (e.g., Park et al., 2007; Qiu et al., 2012). An actual review website, *Amazon.com*, was selected to establish a suitable context for the research. Several previous studies have extracted panel data from *Amazon.com* to explore the effects of online reviews (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Cui et al., 2012; Hu, Koh, & Reddy, 2014). Furthermore, Zhang et

al. (2010a) required participants to browse an ostensible *Amazon.com* webpage, which provided a suitable context for investigating online review effects.

*Amazon.com* was chosen as the source of the online reviews for three reasons. First, the website provides a more realistic setting for the experiment compared to a fictional website, since many consumers are 'familiar' with the popular online retailer (Zhang et al., 2010a). Given the prevalent awareness of *Amazon.com*, there is potential for a vast range of prior experiences to be held within the respondent sample. Second, the website provides a degree of organic control over the motivational orientation of consumers, derived from a sense of familiarity and the likelihood of existing associations. The online review site is positioned as a tool to assist consumers with gathering information about a specific product, as such, user interactions with *Amazon.com* are relatively goal-driven. *Amazon.com* is synonymous with online user-generated reviews, leveraging such connotations will shape consumer mind-sets to be goal-orientated towards online opinion seeking to assist with a purchase decision (Zhang et al., 2010a). Hence, *Amazon.com* offers a priming scenario as respondents assume a purchase decision-making orientation, arising from being placed in a setting that stimulates a predisposition to evaluate products. Third, the use of an actual website makes the contrived product reviews appear more authentic and representative of user-generated content. Accordingly, respondents may evaluate products featured on *Amazon.com* in a more organic manner consistent with usual behaviour and consider related reviews as more convincing, than if they were examining the same product and accompanying reviews on a fictional website (Zhang et al., 2010a). Based on these reasons, *Amazon.com* offers an appropriate setting to examine the effects of online product reviews on purchasing intention.

The simulated online review webpage was intended to imitate *Amazon.com*. The structure, style, and design were replicated to emulate the online retailer. An *Amazon.com* sign was included to appear as though the experimental stimuli were taken from the actual website. Across the intended manipulations, potential covariates were controlled by ensuring the webpage remained unchanged. The replicated webpage consisted of a general description of the product and its functions, which was located alongside the brand name and an image of the focal product (sunglasses). The webpage contained fictitious reviews, average star rating, and the number of reviews. There was a histogram imitating that of *Amazon.com* and other rate-and-review sites, comprising the percentage of consumers who had assigned a star-rating to the sunglasses from one-through to five-star ratings. The percentage distribution was identical for the two negative valence conditions, and then reflected this distribution in the two positive conditions. The final experimental stimuli for each of the twelve manipulations are included in Appendices 7.3.1 to 7.3.12.

### 3.3.2 Selection of Product

Sunglasses have been selected as the experimental product in previous studies to examine symbolic signalling and conspicuous consumption (e.g., Liu, Li, Mizerski, & Soh, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; O'cass & Frost, 2002). The experimental product was chosen based on four criteria. Firstly, the product needed to appeal to participants and, thus, be easily accessed and acquired (Lee & Koo, 2012). Sunglasses are evaluated as 'familiar' to consumers (Yoo & Lee, 2012), an inclusive product category with the majority of consumers having had experience using sunglasses and holding a general understanding of the functional and hedonic benefits. Second, participants had to indicate interest in knowing the sentiments of others relating to the product (Lee & Koo, 2012). Given that sunglasses are consumed publicly, they possess the aptitude to be utilised for higher-order needs in a visible manner to signal status or convey self-image (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Intuitively, the acquisition of sunglasses is not solely for functional benefits, but rather to engage in conformity with a normative reference group or to display an image. Therefore, online reviews are of interest to consumers as they reveal the attitude of others towards the product and, therefore, they reduce the risk of social embarrassment or disapproval transpiring from an ostracised product.

Third, the functional and symbolic attributes of the product category are well-balanced (Yoo & Lee, 2012). Sunglasses can be sold for functional utility by non-luxury brands, or become status-laden goods captured by luxury brands positioned at medium to premium price points. Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han (1992) identified that sunglasses allow consumers to focus on different functional goals, due to having both utilitarian (e.g., frame design, durability) and social image functions (e.g., conveying one's status, style). Fourth, consumers will more than likely recognise the prevalent brands in the selected product category (Yoo & Lee, 2012). In addition, the sunglasses category captures the non-luxury and luxury brand domain, which allows for the selection of brands with differing levels of perceived luxury to incorporate into the study. Accordingly, a pair of sunglasses was considered an appropriate product for this current study. The aviator style of sunglasses used in this study appears visually neutral across all three brands, which eliminates any potential effects derived from frame design.

### 3.3.3 Determining Levels and Manipulating Product Type

Three brands were selected, specifically Duduma, Ray Ban, and Prada, and a priori classified as non-luxury, mid-luxury, and high-luxury conditions, respectively. Previous studies have used actual brands to investigate conspicuous consumption and luxury branding, whereby focus groups were conducted to identify those brands perceived by consumers as high-status and low-status within a certain product category (Liu et al., 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Use of actual brands was considered suitable for this research based on two reasons. First, familiarity with the actual brand

will more than likely induce a brand effect, materialising from established perceptions of the brand, status, and conspicuousness. Such brand effects are exclusive to those individuals with an awareness of and/ or prior knowledge of the brand. Given that many consumers are familiar with and have experience in the sunglasses product category (Yoo & Lee, 2012), intuitively, they will more than likely recognise and recall information on the market leaders. Second, drawing the latter brand effect, the brand names were used to leverage predetermined stereotypes of the brand and its associated level of luxury to develop the treatment conditions. Given that consumers may have pre-established perceptions of brands, on the basis of prior knowledge on brand identity and market positioning in the product category. However, such preferences towards existing sunglasses brands are measured via the consumer Attitude towards the Brand and Brand Familiarity scales.

Duduma is a relatively new brand, and therefore, consumers are likely to have limited knowledge associated with the brand name. Thus, creating an unbranded effect, this in turn impels consumers to focus on the functional utility of the product rather than investing in a recognised brand, which creates an intuitive utilitarian distinction on motives. Accordingly, Duduma is relatively congruent with the non-luxury and utilitarian-orientated product offering in the sunglasses industry.

To establish luxury perceptions, Ray Ban and Prada brands were used due to their dominant presence in the sunglasses product category as market leaders. Hence, consumers are likely to have established an awareness of and be familiar with these brands. Both brands provide a distinct value proposition that materialises from a differing market position and brand image. Despite the equivalent functionality of the non-luxury sunglasses, the luxury counterpart is perceived as desirable due to symbolism attached to the brand that provides situational utility and satisfies value-expressive motives (Hudders, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Ray Ban can be viewed as 'accessible luxury' to the masses, which is overtly different to the premium price and prestige associated with Italian luxury fashion label Prada. Ray Ban has a ubiquitous presence in the sunglasses product category and is positioned as a mainstream luxury, making the brand more widely accessible to consumers due to the provision of affordable, high-quality, branded sunglasses. Notably, Ray Ban is a popular brand and evokes the bandwagon effect in luxury consumption as the popularity triggers further demand (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). Ray Ban has leveraged its brand by popularising its trademark, whereby product popularity may symbolise a must-have product (Leibenstein, 1950) as value is co-created by various social groups' usage of the brand. However, such popularity appeals have eroded the perceived prestige and exclusivity of Ray Ban as a dissociative status signal for those seeking this type of luxury value that

Prada and other premium brands alike exude (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Wee, Ta, & Cheok, 1995). In accordance with the Kapferer (2006) framework, Ray Ban has a mass-luxury orientation which constitutes the lower tier of the luxury pyramid. Hence, Ray Ban signals an a priori mid-luxury positioning in the product category.

Prada is a prototypical luxury brand in the sunglasses product category, positioned in the upper-tier of the luxury market with a premium price point to reinforce perceptions of exclusivity as such products are unattainable to the majority of consumers (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Hence, acquisition and usage of Prada operates as a symbolic cue used to signal prestige, status, and success of the brand users to impress others. Prada targets the lifestyle of elite consumers, linked with the higher echelon (Ferne, Moore, & Doyle, 2010). Hence, Prada signals a much different image of social standing than Ray Ban and is considered a more potent status-laden brand. The aspirational brand gains external validation from others (social utility) as it visually communicates affluence and prestige to others. Prada appeals to 'snob effects' of luxury consumption based on the luxury value derived from few owning it and the 'Veblen effects' as consumers are more inclined to acquire a luxury when the price increases (Leibenstein, 1950). Therefore, the study includes Prada as stimulus for the high-luxury domain in the sunglasses product category.

Product type was manipulated using an identifiable brand logo, which is prominently displayed on the sunglasses frame. Accordingly, the relative luxury perceptions of these brands are evoked, which allows for the conveyance of luxury connotations required to establish the three distinctive experimental conditions. Such prior knowledge is expected to form a mid-luxury positioning in consumers' minds for the Ray-Ban brand, and a high-luxury positioning for the Prada brand.

### **3.3.4 Determining Levels and Manipulating Review Volume**

Previous studies involving a review volume manipulation demonstrate inconsistency in the perceived differences between a low- and high-volume of online reviews. A focus group interview conducted by Park and Lee (2008) revealed that the number of reviews considered to be a small (three reviews), moderate (nine reviews), or large (twenty-seven reviews) volume. In contrast, Park et al. (2007) defined one review as the 'few' level and six reviews as the 'moderate' level. Accordingly, the current study selected four reviews as the low volume condition and 2,074 reviews as the high volume condition to ensure a clear distinction. The total number of reviews available was displayed at the top of the webpage and, again, next to the histogram breakdown on the composition of star ratings. Four reviews were presented in their entirety across all manipulations, however, the high volume condition included a 'pages' feature at the bottom of the webpage to create the perception of additional pages with more consumer reviews available.

### 3.3.5 Determining Levels and Manipulating Review Valence

Review valence was operationalized by the textual content and supplemental star-rating (featured on a five-point scale, where 1 = 'very negative' experience and 5 = 'very positive' experience) for each available review. Similar to *Amazon.com*, an aggregated star-rating was featured at the top of the webpage, providing an overview of the overall evaluative sentiment of experienced users.

Four contrived online reviews were used as manipulative stimuli for each review valence condition. The review content was developed from a combination of words and phrases extracted from actual user-generated reviews sourced from *Amazon.com* (Park et al., 2007). Each review was comprised of product information, subjective evaluation, and details about the product experience. Similar to Park et al. (2007), the reviews focused on the functional qualities with no mention of the brand or the price. Based on observations of actual reviews for sunglasses on *Amazon.com*, it was possible to identify the key product attributes that were most frequently discussed by consumers. An approach adopted from previous studies (Lee & Koo, 2012; Qiu et al., 2012) to ensure the reviews discussed relevant product information was used in this study. Style, material, UV protection, and design were recognised as central to the product evaluation. Polyorat, Alden, and Kim (2007) identified a comparable list of salient attributes for sunglasses. Additionally, the breadth and depth of information available are proven moderators of the influence of online reviews (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Park et al., 2007) and, therefore, to ensure consistency across treatments review length was controlled and set to two lines of text.

To create a negative review, any positive adjectives were replaced with their negative counterparts. The polarity of review sentiment was made clear by ensuring a positively- or negatively-framed consensus amid available reviews. The star-rating provided a heuristic cue of review valence. One-star and two-star ratings were used to signify a negative review (extremely/ moderately negative) and, in contrast, four-star and five-star ratings were used to represent a positive review (moderately/ extremely positive). Consistent with Qiu et al. (2012), this approach was used to enhance the perceived authenticity of the stimuli, since reviewers are not likely to unanimously vote one-star or five-star ratings when evaluating the focal product. A set of four reviews was developed for each of the two valence manipulations to reflect either a positively- or negatively-framed condition, refer to Appendices 7.1.1 and 7.1.2 respectively.

## 3.4 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

### 3.4.1 Measures for Independent Variables

#### 3.4.1.1 Review Valence

Extant literature has used different means of measuring the salience of Review Valence, which are reflective of specific message conditions. The current study adopted a few approaches that were empirically tested in previous studies to ensure the construct was accurately manipulated. Several researchers ask subjects to indicate the extent to which the salience of message framing is positive or negative. In this manner, participants were asked to recall the online reviews they had read, and then indicate their level of agreement with two statements about the positive-framing of the reviews using a seven-point Likert scale adapted from Park and Lee (2008), as seen in Table 3.2. This scale had a reported internal consistency of .94 (Park & Lee, 2008).

To further assess the efficacy of the valence manipulation, a six item semantic-differential scale was developed for the current study, in order to measure the emotional response triggered from reading product reviews. The scale included the two-item scale taken from Kim and Gupta (2012) that asked participants to specify the extent to which the online reviews are similar or different to the anchored terms (“favourable–unfavourable,” and “positive–negative”) on a nine-point scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ). However, this adaption uses a seven-point scale. In addition, an abbreviated version of the original scale from Edell and Burke (1987) ‘Feelings Toward Ads’ scale was included; the measure is composed of both positive affective feelings towards a given advertisement and negative affective feelings as well. The scale was initially composed of 65 items that comprised three sub-dimensions: upbeat feelings, warm feelings, and negative feelings toward the ad. Four items were selected; two items were taken from the negative feelings (namely, ‘Skeptical’ and ‘Critical’) and two items from upbeat feelings (‘Interested’ and ‘Enthusiastic’). The six items of the resulting scale are presented in Table 3.3.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
RP_1	Overall, the online reviews positively evaluate the product
RP_1	Most of the online reviews recommend buying the product

**Table 3.2: Likert Items for Review Positiveness**

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Semantic-differential Items</b>
RV_1	Disinterested/ Interested
RV_2	Not critical/ Critical*
RV_3	Not sceptical/ Sceptical*
RV_4	Not enthusiastic/ Enthusiastic
RV_5	Negative/ Positive
RV_6	Unfavourable/ Favourable

**Table 3.3: Semantic-differential Items for Review Valence**

#### **3.4.1.2 Review Volume**

The manipulation check for Review Volume involved two previously validated measures from the literature, which were adapted to fit the current research. A manipulation check used by Park and Lee (2008) was included, measuring review volume on a two item seven-point Likert scale that is designed to check consumers' perceptions of the quantity of reviews available (as presented in Table 3.4). This scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .88 (Park & Lee, 2008). In addition, a three item seven-point Likert scale from Zhang et al. (2014a) was included. The scale was originally taken from Park et al. (2007) Review Quantity scale, and modified by Zhang et al. (2014a) to incorporate another item pertaining to the perceived popularity of the product. This slightly more elaborate measure was used in the current study; the wording of the statements was adjusted slightly to capture the specific details of this experimental research (specifically, 'sunglasses' and 'Amazon.com'). The specific items can be viewed in Table 3.5.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
RV_1	Overall, the number of online reviews presented is large
RV_2	The quantity of review information is great

**Table 3.4: Likert Items for Review Volume (1)**

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
RVol_1	Many consumers have posted reviews about the sunglasses
RVol_2	The sunglasses have a large number of online reviews
RVol_3	The sunglasses were very popular on Amazon.com

**Table 3.5: Likert Items for Review Volume (2)**

#### **3.4.1.3 Product Type**

Product Type was measured using two scales adapted from previous research, in order to confirm that participants were able to differentiate between the non-luxury, mid-luxury, and high-luxury product manipulations. Notably, several researchers have developed multidimensional frameworks comprising of factors that constitute a luxury brand (Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001; Kapferer, 1998). A luxury scale from Dubois and Laurent (1994) measured the perceptions of luxury as a general concept and was considered not suitable for this research but, rather, the Brand Luxury



Index (BLI) from Vigneron and Johnson (2004) was appropriate. The BLI scale is an instrument capable of evaluating luxury brands on the amount of luxury perceived to be contained in a brand or product. A shortened version of the original twenty-item scale was used, whereby respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale the extent to which the product is different or similar to anchored terms for the six bipolar-adjective pairs to evaluate the perceived luxuriousness of a product (as seen in Table 3.6).

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Semantic-differential Items</b>
PT_1	Affordable/ Extremely expensive
PT_2	Popular/ Elitist
PT_3	Not prestigious/ Prestigious
PT_4	Literal/ Symbolic
PT_5	Ordinary/ Distinctive

**Table 3.6: Semantic-differential Items for Product Type**

### 3.4.2 Measures for Dependent Variables

#### 3.4.2.1 Perceived Informative Value

The Perceived Informative Value of the review was measured using a three-item, seven-point Likert scale adapted from Gilly, Graham, Wolfenbarger, and Yale (1998), as seen in Table 3.7. This scale was later used by Kim and Gupta (2012), who viewed the perceived informative value of reviews as an indicator of review persuasiveness. The scale in its original form was a nine-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree), and was adjusted to a seven-point rating of agreement scale for the current study. Gilly et al. (1998) reported the inter-item reliability for this measure was .93.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
PIV_1	The user reviews provided were useful
PIV_2	I think I learned a lot about the reviewed sunglasses after reading the user reviews
PIV_3	The user reviews provided valuable information

**Table 3.7: Likert Items for Perceived Informative Value**

#### 3.4.2.2 Perceived Persuasiveness

The perception of review persuasiveness is included as a dependent variable, since previous research has recognised that review valence is a moderator of Perceived Persuasiveness. A previously validated four-item, seven-point Likert scale was adopted from Zhang et al. (2014a) for the current study, which is an adaptation of the original four semantic-pair items developed by Zhang et al. (2010a). The reported Cronbach alpha was .79 (Zhang et al., 2014a). An additional item was added to the four positively-worded statements, which was adjusted from the 'helpful/ not

helpful’ bipolar adjective pair in Zhang et al. (2010a). The items for the resulting scale are presented in Table 3.8.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
PP_1	The arguments of these reviews were convincing
PP_2	The arguments of these reviews were persuasive
PP_3	The arguments of these reviews were strong
PP_4	The arguments of these reviews were good
PP_5	The arguments of these reviews were helpful

**Table 3.8: Likert Items for Perceived Persuasiveness**

#### **3.4.2.3 eWOM Effect**

The electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Effect was measured using the original three-item scale developed by Park and Lee (2009), although the scale was adapted to a seven-point rating of agreement scale. The reliability coefficient reported for the scale was .73 (Park & Lee, 2009). The items for the final scale are presented in Table 3.9.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
EWOM_1	I will refer to this online information in a purchase decision
EWOM_2	Overall, I think this online information is credible
EWOM_3	The online information will significantly affect my purchase decision

**Table 3.9: Likert Items for eWOM Effect**

#### **3.4.2.4 Attitude towards the Reviews**

The Attitude towards the Review scale was adopted from Sen and Lerman (2007), asking participants to indicate the degree to which the contrived online reviews are similar to or different from the anchored constructs for three semantic-differential items (refer to Table 3.10). The scale has an internal consistency of .85.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Semantic-differential Items</b>
AR_1	Not at all useful/ Very useful
AR_2	Not at all accurate/ Very accurate
AR_3	Not informative at all/ Very informative

**Table 3.10: Semantic-differential Items for Attitude towards the Review**

#### **3.4.2.5 Information Adoption**

The current study is concerned with participants’ inclination to adopt the advice received from the online reviews into their purchase decision-making. A theoretical model of information adoption conceptualised by Sussman and Siegal (2003) explained that perceived usefulness of information operates as a moderator of the information adoption process in decision-making. Accordingly, a four-item scale was adopted from Filieri (2015) that was informed by previous studies (Cheung et al.,

2009; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The inter-item reliability for this scale was .86 (Filieri, 2015). The specific items are presented in Table 3.11, which were measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
IA_1	Reviews make it easier for me to make a purchase decision (i.e. purchase or not purchase)
IA_2	Online reviews have enhanced my effectiveness in making purchase decisions
IA_3	Online reviews have motivated me to make a purchase decision
IA_4	The last time I read online reviews, I adopted consumers' recommendations and purchased (or not purchased) the recommended product/ service

**Table 3.11: Likert Items for Information Adoption**

#### **3.4.2.6 Attitude towards the Product**

A measure for product attitude was included to assess a consumer evaluation of the product after exposure to the experimental website. A number of scales have been used in previous studies to measure the construct (Kim & Gupta, 2012; Lee et al., 2008a), although, there is some consistency in the semantic-pair items selected. Specifically, the three-item scale from Lee et al. (2008a) used "favourable/ unfavourable" and "bad/ good," while Kim and Gupta (2012) included the latter two items in their four-item scale along with "negative/ positive" and "like/ dislike". An extended seven-item scale was adopted from Dou, Walden, Lee, and Lee (2012) for the current study, which was informed by the Attitude towards the Brand scale from Holbrook and Batra (1987). The measure reported a Cronbach alpha of .95 (Dou et al., 2012). The seven items measured attitudes along a seven-point scale, presented in Table 3.12.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Semantic-differential Items</b>
AP_1	Dislike it/ Like it
AP_2	Unfavourable/ Favourable
AP_3	Negative/ Positive
AP_4	Bad/ Good
AP_5	Not expensive/ Very expensive
AP_6	Not innovative/ Innovative
AP_7	Not useable/ Useable

**Table 3.12: Semantic-differential Items for Attitude towards the Product**

#### **3.4.2.7 Attitude towards the Brand**

Attitude towards the Brand is defined as a consumer's internal evaluation of the brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981, p. p. 318), which can be affected by exposure to online reviews regarding a certain branded product. Hence, this construct was measured using five semantic-pair items adopted from Spears and Singh (2004), an extended version of original Attitude towards the Advertised Brand scale developed by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) with three items ('good/ bad', 'pleasant/ unpleasant',

favourable/ unfavourable'). The measure reported a Cronbach alpha between .95 and .97 (Spears & Singh, 2004). The current study tested the five items on a seven-point scale, see Table 3.13.

<i><b>Coding</b></i>	<i><b>Semantic-differential Items</b></i>
AB_1	Unappealing/ Appealing
AB_2	Bad/ Good
AB_3	Unpleasant/ Pleasant
AB_4	Unfavourable/ Favourable
AB_5	Unlikeable/ Likeable

**Table 3.13: Semantic-differential Items for Attitude towards the Brand (Post-exposure)**

#### ***3.4.2.8 Conspicuous and Status Consumption***

A point of interest for luxury consumers is the perceived ability of the product to satisfy Conspicuous and Status Consumption motives. Inherently, these consumption tendencies of individuals are often driven by a desire to sustain and enhance one's self-concept (Belk, 1988). Specifically, status consumption is a matter of individuals seeking to gain social prestige through owning status-laden possessions (Eastman et al., 1999); however, conspicuous consumption focuses on signalling wealth to others through the public display or overt usage of a product (Mason, 1981). A measure pertaining to these two factors was adapted from O'Cass and McEwen (2004), utilising thirteen items on a seven-point Likert scale. An internal reliability score of .89 was reported (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). The scale items are presented below in Table 3.14.

<i><b>Factor</b></i>	<i><b>Coding</b></i>	<i><b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b></i>
Conspicuous	CC_1	This product/ brand would be noticed by others
	CC_2	This product/ brand is best used in the presence of others
	CC_3	This product/ brand would help me gain respect
	CC_4	This product/ brand would help me gain popularity
	CC_5	This product/ brand lets people know who I am
	CC_6	I want to be seen using this product/ brand
Status	CC_7	This product/brand is a symbol of professional success
	CC_8	This product/ brand is a symbol of prestige
	CC_9	This product/ brand indicates my wealth
	CC_10	This product/ brand indicates my achievements
	CC_11	People who buy this product/ brand are interested in status
	CC_12	The status this product/ brand provides is important to me
	CC_13	This product/ brand's status enhances my image

**Table 3.14: Likert Items for Conspicuous and Status Consumption**

#### ***3.4.2.9 Need for Uniqueness***

Need for Uniqueness was measured to assess the extent to which an individual perceives the product will satisfy their identity motives, after exposure to the experimental stimuli. Need for uniqueness is an individualistic trait expressed by pursuing differentness relative to others via the

acquisition, use, and disposition of products to sustain and improve one's self- and social- image (Tian et al., 2001). Accordingly, such trait antecedents operate in a manner that posits for luxury consumption motivation, materialising from preferences for the associated uniqueness and exclusive undertones of luxury products. The widely cited 'Need for Uniqueness' scale developed by Tian et al. (2001) incorporates 31-items that comprise three behavioural manifestations of creative choice counterconformity, unpopular choice counterconformity, and avoidance similarity, which are collectively accounted for by this higher-order factor. For purposes of this research, the 11-items of the Creative Choice and Counterconformity factor were removed and adapted for the present study on a seven-point Likert scale (refer to Table 3.15).

<b><i>Coding</i></b>	<b><i>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</i></b>
NU_1	This branded product would tell people that I am different
NU_2	I would purchase this branded product to create a more distinctive personal image
NU_3	I would purchase this branded product in order to create a style that is all my own
NU_4	This branded product would communicate my uniqueness
NU_5	This branded product would help create a personal image for myself that cannot be duplicated
NU_6	This branded product is original
NU_7	This branded product would develop my personal uniqueness
NU_8	This branded product is interesting and unusual, and will assist me in establishing a distinctive image
NU_9	This branded product would express my individuality
NU_10	This branded product would be used to shape my personal image
NU_11	This branded product would add to me personal identity

**Table 3.15: Likert Items for Need for Uniqueness**

#### ***3.4.2.10 Social Value***

The Social Value scale conceptualised by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) was included to test the perceived degree of societal value associated with the product, since an antecedent for luxury consumption is being able to derive utility from a product's capability to improve social self-concept (Hudders, 2012; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Previous studies have considered the scale as an appropriate measure of social signalling (Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2010). For the current study, a measure was adopted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001). The four-item, seven-point Likert scale is presented below (refer to Table 3.16).

<b><i>Coding</i></b>	<b><i>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</i></b>
SV_1	This product would help me to feel accepted
SV_2	This product would help improve the way I am perceived
SV_3	This product would make a good impression on other people
SV_4	This product would give its owner social approval

**Table 3.16: Likert Items for Social Value**

#### 3.4.2.11 Purchase Intention

Purchase Intention was measured to indicate the extent to which consumers seek to engage in purchase behaviour for the focal product. To determine the intention to purchase, the construct was measured using a three-item, seven-point semantic differential scale adopted from Dou et al. (2012), a shortened version of the original scale developed by Bearden, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1984) that used four items (“uncertain/ certain” was removed). The inter-item reliability for the scale was .88 (Dou et al., 2012). The final three items are presented in Table 3.17.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Semantic-differential Items</b>
PIntent_1	Unlikely/ Likely
PIntent_2	Improbable/ Probable
PIntent_3	Impossible/ Possible

**Table 3.17: Semantic-differential Items for Purchase Intention**

### 3.4.3 Measures for Covariate Variables

#### 3.4.3.1 Consumer Involvement

Consumer Involvement was used to measure the level of interest devoted to reading online reviews on the focal product, as a direct function of the perceived relevance of the product based on innate needs, interests, and values of the individual. In order to measure the Involvement construct, the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) composed of 20 semantic-differential items as originally developed by Zaichkowsky (1985) was selected; however, a shortened version of this measure directed towards advertising context was employed in this research (Zaichkowsky, 1994). The ten items were operationalised on a seven-point scale (refer to Table 3.18). The coefficient alpha for the ten-item PII for Advertising ranged from .91 to .96 across products and ads (Zaichkowsky, 1994).

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Semantic-differential Items</b>
PI_1	Unimportant/ Important
PI_2	Irrelevant/ Relevant
PI_3	Means nothing to me/ Means a lot to me
PI_4	Worthless/ Valuable
PI_5	Boring/ Interesting
PI_6	Unexciting/ Exciting
PI_7	Unappealing/ Appealing
PI_8	Mundane/ Fascinating
PI_9	Not needed/ Needed
PI_10	Uninvolving/ Involving

**Table 3.18: Semantic-differential Items for Consumer Involvement**

### 3.4.3.2 Materialism

Materialism was measured using the eighteen-item Material Values scale taken from Richins (2004), an adapted version based on an original scale developed by Richins and Dawson (1992). This covariate is relevant as it considers the importance a consumer attaches to possessions. At the highest level of materialism, such possessions assume a central position in one's life and are viewed as a means to happiness; that satisfaction is achieved by acquisition and interaction with products (Belk, 1984; Richins, 1987). The eighteen items consist of three factors that reflect possessions as defining a *Success* dimension, an *Acquisition Centrality* dimension, and a purchase as a pursuit of *Happiness* dimension. This measure has a reported Coefficient alpha of .87 (Richins, 2004). The current study altered the scale to a seven-point scale, refer to Table 3.19.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
Success	M_1	I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes
	M_2	Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions
	M_3	I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success *
	M_4	The things I own say a lot about how well I am going in life
	M_5	I like to own things that impress people
	M_6	I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own *
Acquisition Centrality	M_7	I usually buy only the things I need *
	M_8	I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned *
	M_9	The things I own aren't all that important to me *
	M_10	I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical
	M_11	Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure
	M_12	I like a lot of luxury in my life
	M_13	I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know *
Happiness	M_14	I have all the things I really need to enjoy life *
	M_15	My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have
	M_16	I would not be any happier if I owned nicer things *
	M_17	I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things
	M_18	It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like

**Table 3.19: Likert Items for Materialism**

**\*Reverse coded**

### 3.4.3.3 Interpersonal Influence

The current study is concerned with participants' susceptibility to interpersonal influence when reading online reviews. In order to measure this disposition, a twelve-item scale was adopted from Bearden et al. (1989), operationalised as a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree'

to ‘strongly agree’. The multi-dimensional construct considers the normative and informational influences on consumer behaviour (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). The general trait of interpersonal influence tends to vary across individuals, and refers to the need to identify with or improve one’s image from the viewpoint of significant others through the acquisition and use of certain brands and products, a willingness to learn about products by seeking information from others or observing others, and/ or the tendency to conform with others’ expectations in relation to purchase decisions (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 474). Accordingly, the 12-item scale was relevant for this current study, see Table 3.20.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (<i>strongly disagree/ strongly agree</i>)</b>
II_1	It is important that others like the products/ brands I buy
II_2	If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy
II_3	I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them
II_4	When buying products, I generally purchase those brands I think others will approve of
II_5	I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class
II_6	To make sure I buy the right product/ brand, I often observe what others are buying and using
II_7	If I had little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product
II_8	I frequently gather information from friends and family about a product before I buy
II_9	I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others
II_10	If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy
II_11	I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase
II_12	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase

**Table 3.20: Likert Items for Interpersonal Influence**

### **3.4.4 Measures for Socio-demographics**

The following socio-demographic measures were included to help understand the existing attitudes and experiences of the sample.

#### **3.4.4.1 General Attitude towards Reviews**

A measure for General Attitude towards Word-of-Mouth was adopted from Khare et al. (2011), which requires participants to indicate their level of agreement with six statements outlined on a seven-point scale (see Table 3.21). The inter-item reliability for this measure was .87 (Khare et al., 2011).



<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
GAR_1	I am comfortable with reading online reviews
GAR_2	I have used online reviews to help me make a decision about a product or service
GAR_3	In the past, my decisions have been influenced by reviews that I read online
GAR_4	I like to discuss my product/ service experience with others
GAR_5	I like to learn about others' product and service experiences
GAR_6	Overall, providing and receiving word-of-mouth helps consumers make better decisions

**Table 3.21: Likert Items for General Attitude towards Reviews**

#### **3.4.4.2 General Attitude towards Online Reviews**

A second variable integrated an online orientation compared to the latter measure, whereby an adapted version of Park et al. (2007) popularly cited General Attitude towards Reviews scale (e.g., Lee et al., 2008a; Qiu et al., 2012) was selected. The original scale measured six items on a six-point Likert scale, however, Park and Lee (2008) reduced the scale to four-items (removing the reversed scaled items). The adapted version is adopted in this study; Park and Lee (2008) reported the inter-item reliability for this measure as .77. The scale measures the individual differences of general attitude towards online reviews on a seven-point Likert (see Table 3.22).

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
GAOR_1	When I buy a product online, I always read reviews that are presented on the website
GAOR_2	When I buy a product online, the reviews presented on the website are helpful in my decision making
GAOR_3	When I buy a product online, the reviews presented on the website make me confident in purchasing the product
GAOR_4	If I don't read the reviews presented on the website when buying a product online, I worry about my purchase decision

**Table 3.22: Likert Items for General Attitude towards Online Reviews**

#### **3.4.4.3 Perceived Product Class Knowledge**

Consumer knowledge of a product category was included to understand any extraneous effect caused by variations in participant responses. Consumer behaviour theory has identified knowledge as an individual difference variable influencing the decision-making process, most notably, the information search phase (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1990; Raju, Lonial, & Mangold, 1995). The five items were adapted from Flynn and Goldsmith (1999) and employed a seven-point Likert response format. The scale includes two positively-worded and three negatively-worded items, which provides a balance in the scale via the direction of item wording (Ray, 1985) (refer to Table 3.23). The scale has reported an internal consistency of .93 (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999).

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
PPCK_1	I know a lot about sunglasses
PPCK_2	I do not feel very knowledgeable about sunglasses*
PPCK_3	Among my circle of friends, I'm one of the 'experts' on sunglasses
PPCK_4	Compared to most other people, I know less about sunglasses*
PPCK_5	When it comes to sunglasses, I really don't know a lot*

**Table 3.23: Likert Items for Perceived Product Class Knowledge**

**\*Reverse coded**

#### **3.4.4.4 Brand Familiarity**

Brand Familiarity was measured in this study, as it has been empirically proven to have a significant influence on product evaluations and preferences (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Zhou et al., 2010). Brand familiarity was assessed by a scale adopted from Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden (2003) and later used by Zhou et al. (2010) who both sought to control for the potential exogenous influences of brand familiarity. The scale has a reported Cronbach alpha between .71 and .82 (Steenkamp et al., 2003). The scale was developed based on the four-item bipolar adjective scale from Oliver and Bearden (1985). However, this study uses three items adjusted to positively worded statements on a seven-point Likert scale, refer to Table 3.24.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
BFam_1	I am familiar with the brand
BFam_2	I'm very knowledgeable about this brand
BFam_3	I have seen many advertisements about this brand in mass media

**Table 3.24: Likert Items for Brand Familiarity**

#### **3.4.4.5 General Attitude towards the Brand**

The measure for brand attitude was adapted from Ullrich and Brunner (2015), using four items on a seven-point Likert scale. This scale was informed by other brand attitude scales used in previous studies (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). The coefficient alpha score was .92, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency (Ullrich & Brunner, 2015). The original Attitude towards the Brand scale developed by Mitchell and Olson (1981) used a four-item semantic-differential scale ("bad/ good", "dislike very much/ like very much", "pleasant/ unpleasant", "poor quality/ high quality"), these items were adapted into three positively-worded statements and a negatively-worded one by Ullrich and Brunner (2015). The resultant scale was adapted to a seven-point Likert scale, see Table 3.25.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
ABrand_1	The [brand name] brand is good
ABrand_2	I dislike the [brand name] brand*
ABrand_3	The [brand name] brand is pleasant
ABrand_4	The [brand name] brand offers high quality

**Table 3.25: Likert Items for General Attitude towards the Brand**

\* Reverse coded

#### **3.4.4.6 Attitude towards the Website**

In order to measure the general favourability towards *Amazon.com*, the Attitude toward the Site scale was adapted from Chen and Wells (1999). The six items were measured on a seven-point scale, refer to Table 3.26. The measure has a reported coefficient alpha of .92 (Chen & Wells, 1999).

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
AWeb_1	This website makes it easy for me to build a relationship with the online community
AWeb_2	I would like to visit this website again in the future
AWeb_3	I'm satisfied with the services provided by this website
AWeb_4	I feel comfortable in surfing the website
AWeb_5	I feel surfing this website is a good way for me to spend my time
AWeb_6	Compared with other online review websites, I would rate this one as the best one

**Table 3.26: Likert Items for Attitude towards the Website**

#### **3.4.4.7 Perceived Source Trustworthiness**

As suggested in previous studies a measure of the Perceived Source Trustworthiness was included, since trust perceptions are an antecedent in shaping attitudes towards online reviews in decision-making (Pan and Chiou, 2011). The scale consisted of four items adapted from Feick and Higie (1992) that were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (presented in Table 3.27).

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Likert Items (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)</b>
PST_1	The reviewers are trustworthy
PST_2	The reviewers would be honest in their feedback on the sunglasses
PST_3	The reviewers appear to be dependable
PST_4	The reviewers seem to be sincere

**Table 3.27: Likert Items for Perceived Source Trustworthiness**

### 3.4.5 Demographic Measures

Five demographic questions were asked to control any differential effects on responses that may arise from demographic variations in the sample. A number of studies have shown gender differences to occur in an electronic commerce context (e.g., Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004). Relative to their male counterparts, female consumers are more responsive to a mix of positive and negative reviews (Zhang, Cheung, & Lee, 2014b). A finding consistent with differences in information processing patterns across genders, where females are viewed as comprehensive processors while males are regarded as selective processors (Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991; Richard, Chebat, Yang, & Putrevu, 2010). Accordingly, female consumers are more likely to engage in systematic processing of information than males. Furthermore, the negativity effect is more prominent among females than males (Bae & Lee, 2011). In relation to luxury consumption, females tend to hold a more positive attitude toward and a greater purchase intention for luxury brands compared to non-luxury brands than males (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013).

Age has been empirically proven to be a moderator of motives for luxury brand consumption (Schade, Hegner, Horstmann, & Brinkmann, 2016). As consumers get older, the acquisition of luxury and status-laden products becomes less important to their self-image, compared to younger age groups (Belk, 1985; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Schade et al. (2016) found that luxury brands play an 'identity supporting' role for late adolescents (16–25 years) and young adults (26–39 years), however, such social functions have no relevance for middle-aged adults (40-59 years). These findings are consistent with previous research (Belk, 1988; Erikson, 1993), recognising that young adults possess a strong motivation to express their self-identity, while late adolescents have a weak sense of identity and seek to conform to expectations of their peer group.

Income provides consumers with purchasing power, and therefore, is it positively related to motivation for identity and status consumption as they have a greater means to engage in such behaviour (Belk, 1988; Dubois & Duquesne, 1993). Internet users with higher incomes tend to perceive lower implicit risks associated with online purchases, due to their ability to endure potential financial losses (Hernández, Jiménez, & José Martín, 2011).

Accordingly, demographic questions pertaining to gender, age, employment, income, and education were included.

### 3.5 ONLINE EXPERIMENT

Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), the largest online labour market where registered users perform small tasks for micro payments. This convenience sampling approach via MTurk has been used previously in research papers investigating electronic word-of-mouth (e.g., Chen, Kim, & Lin, 2015; Larson & Denton, 2014; Wu, 2013a). Relative to other subject pools, MTurk facilitates low-cost experiments as research subjects are inexpensive to recruit and less time is required to implement studies (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). Moreover, it provides a suitable sample pool for the current study, since workers are predominantly female aged between 18 and 81 with a mean age of 36 years (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010, p. 412). The demographic composition of the MTurk respondent pool is more representative of the general population and diverse than the equivalent student and in-person convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2012). Hence, MTurk increases the external validity of research beyond that of the undergraduate population.

Furthermore, extant studies demonstrate the increased internal validity of running virtual experiments with participants sourced from Mechanical Turk (e.g., Horton, Rand, & Zeckhauser, 2011; Paolacci et al., 2010). The recruitment platform prevents the likelihood of subjects violating treatment assignment as it implements controls for multiple responses, such as restricting users to one entry and tracking IP addresses (Berinsky et al., 2012). Moreover, concerns over subject inattentiveness are alleviated by integrating attention checks into the survey and restricting participation to users with a task approval rate greater than 95%. MTurk promotes attentiveness by withholding payment from participants, who fail attention checks or who indicate that they do not fit the demographic criteria. Such measures support internal validity, allowing researchers to assume that causal estimates appropriately reflect the effects of the experimental manipulation in the original setting.

Participants were randomly assigned to experimental treatments, in order to control the effects of possible confounding variables and, subsequently, increase the overall internal validity of the study. Such random assignment ensured that individual differences in cognitive style, personality, and personal online experiences were controlled (Hong, Thong, & Tam, 2004). An outline of the experimental procedure is presented below. The questions were restricted with one to three per page in a manner that eliminates the need for scrolling and avoids overwhelming participants. The experiment and questionnaire can be separated into six sections based on the type of content and questions involved.

### **3.5.1 Section One – Information and Consent (Appendix 7.4.1)**

Subjects were presented with an Information Sheet (see Appendix 7.4.1) that included a broad overview of the research without indicating the central purpose, in order to alleviate internal validity concerns associated with subjects exhibiting demand characteristics that arise from suspecting the researcher's intent and behaving accordingly (Orne, 1962). Subjects were then asked for consent to participate in the survey. To detect non-qualifying participants, a pre-screening feature required participants to confirm that they were a female aged 18 to 45, prior to being able to proceed with the questionnaire. For those who selected 'No' to the question, they were forwarded to the end of the questionnaire.

### **3.5.2 Section Two – Stimuli Exposure (Appendix 7.4.2)**

Participants were randomly assigned to one of twelve experimental conditions. Each condition involved a manipulation of Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type to the simulated online review webpage. The simulated webpage was presented in isolation for one and a half minutes, before participants were able to proceed to the next page. Participants were instructed to use the available time to consider the webpage content and read the online reviews.

### **3.5.3 Section Three – Review Volume, Review Valence, and Product Type (Appendix 7.4.3)**

Following exposure to the experimental stimuli, respondents were asked questions about the contrived online reviews in relation to the independent variable manipulations. The sequential order of the questions remained consistent across all treatments to eliminate any order effects. The first four questions pertained to the Review Valence condition. After that, two questions asked about Review Volume. Followed by, two questions for the Product Type manipulation. All questions needed to be fully answered before the participant was able to advance onto the next section.

### **3.5.4 Section Four – Dependent Measures and Covariate Measures (Appendix 7.4.4)**

This section was comprised of eleven dependent variable questions, and three covariate questions. All scales were measured on seven-point ratings of agreement from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' Concealed within the Materialism question, there was an attention check within the scale items that asked participants 'If you are reading this question, please select strongly disagree.'

### **3.5.5 Section Five – Socio-demographics and Demographics (Appendix 7.4.5)**

The fifth section asked respondents to answer socio-demographic and demographic questions about themselves. There were seven socio-demographic questions pertaining to their awareness, attitude and preferences in relation to user-generated reviews, the brand and host website. A second attention check was concealed in the 'General Attitude towards Online Reviews' scale, asking

participants 'If you are reading this question, please select strongly agree'. Moreover, the five demographic questions included a question for gender and age, which acted as a second control to ensure participants met the demographic criteria. The control measure was later utilised to remove participants that violated the criteria outlined in Section 3.5.1. There were two questions asking about personal usage of online reviews and sunglasses. Lastly, participants were asked to provide their Mechanical Turk worker ID.

### **3.5.6 Section Six – Finish and Debrief (Appendix 7.4.6)**

The final section thanked participants for their time taken to complete the survey. The full aim of the study was disclosed to participants before they submitted their response and the questionnaire ended.

## **3.6 PRE-TESTING PROCEDURE**

Prior to the final data collection, the entire experiment was screened under an inclusive pre-test. Such pre-testing procedures were crucial to ascertain the effectiveness of the independent variable manipulations to ensure that respondents perceive significant differences between each of the experimental conditions. Secondly, pre-testing was used to assess the reliability and validity of the selected scales for measuring each of the constructs. Finally, pre-testing confirmed the online questionnaire was operational and recorded all the information required. The pre-test scrutinised the experiment to confirm that the three manipulations were working as intended and to improve data-quality by removing ineffective scale items for the final questionnaire.

### **3.6.1 Pre-Testing Sample**

Undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Canterbury were recruited via class email lists to participate in the pre-test. As an incentive to partake, prospective participants were offered the chance to win one of five \$100 Westfield vouchers. A copy of the recruitment message is available in Appendix 7.2.2. A pulsing strategy was adopted to recruit participants whereby eleven classes were emailed initially, exposing the invitation to approximately 2,175 students. Following in close succession, an additional nine classes received the email (specifically, in recruitment waves of five classes, followed by a further four classes) in order to generate a sufficient response, which invited a further 1,196 students to participate. All undergraduate students were included in the pre-study, regardless of their gender or age. Overall, this resulted in a total of 3,371 undergraduate students being potentially exposed to the recruitment email. Of those contacted, 457 responded equating to a response rate of 13.56%. However, from the 457 participants, 185 respondents were omitted from analyses due to low completion times (less than five minutes), incomplete responses,

or violating the two attention checks discussed earlier, where the remaining 272 formed the respondent sample for the pre-test analysis.

### **3.6.2 Pre-Test Results**

The structure and reliability of the measurement scales were tested using Principal Components Analysis (with Varimax rotation) and the Cronbach alpha procedure (Cronbach, 1951). The validity of each measurement scale was examined through evaluating the degree to which the measureable components represent the construct. Such analyses were performed to condense the number of scale items in the final questionnaire, in order to minimise the participant completion time.

#### ***3.6.2.1 Scale Structure and Reliability***

Principle Component Analysis (with Varimax rotation) was used to test the unidimensionality of the measurement scales. Scale items with communality scores less than .50 were removed. Moreover, scale items with a loading score less than .30 were suppressed, however, those considered to be equally loading onto two or more factors were deemed to be cross-loading and subsequently removed. Such practice ensured inappropriate scale items were removed, in order to establish an effective scale to reliably measure each of the constructs. Removed items from such analyses are presented in Table 3.28.



<i>Scale Item</i>	<i>Communality Score</i>	<i>Mixed Factor Loading</i>
<b>Review Volume (2)</b>		
RVol_3      The sunglasses were very popular on Amazon.com	.45	
<b>Product Type</b>		
PT_2      Popular/ Elitist	.30	
<b>Attitude towards the Product</b>		
AP_5      Not expensive/ Very expensive	.01	
AP_6      Not innovative/ Innovative		.49, .65
<b>Conspicuous and Status Consumption</b>		
CC_1      This product/ brand would be noticed by others	.45	
CC_2      This product/ brand is best used in the presence of others	.45	
CC_6      I want to be seen using this product/ brand	.49	
CC_10      This product/ brand indicates my achievements	.48	
CC_12      The status this product/ brand provides is important to me	.47	
CC_13      This product/ brand's status enhances my image		.69, .40
<b>Need for Uniqueness</b>		
NU_6      This branded product is original	.37	
<b>Product Involvement</b>		
PI_3      Means nothing to me/ Means a lot to me		.46, .70
PI_4      Worthless/ Valuable		.62, .53
PI_7      Unappealing/ Appealing		.65, .57
PI_9      Not needed/ Needed	.46	
<b>Materialism</b>		
M_1      I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes		.58, .46
M_2      Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions	.46	
M_4      The things I own say a lot about how well I am going in life	.42	
M_5      I like to own things that impress people		.57, .23, .44
M_8      I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned *		.37, .57, .35
M_9      The things I own aren't all that important to me *		.10, .11, .80

M_11	Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure	.42	
M_12	I like a lot of luxury in my life	.50	
M_13	I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know *		.58, .52
M_14	I have all the things I really need to enjoy life *	.28	
M_16	I would not be any happier if I owned nicer things *	.49	
<b>Interpersonal Influence</b>			
II_1	It is important that others like the products/ brands I buy	.49	
II_3	I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them	.36	
II_6	To make sure I buy the right product/ brand, I often observe what others are buying and using		.44, .69
<b>General Attitude towards Online Reviews</b>			
GAOR_4	If I don't read the reviews presented on the website when buying a product online, I worry about my purchase decision	.44	
<b>Attitude towards the Website</b>			
AWeb_5	I feel surfing this website is a good way for me to spend my time	.44	

**Table 3.28: Removed Scale Items**

Following on from Principal Components Analysis, the scales were tested for internal consistency (reliability) via the Cronbach alpha procedure. The results indicated that the secondary factor of the Review Valance scale (Negative Affect) produced a low reliability score, leading to the two items (RV\_2, RV\_3) being removed. Similarly, the secondary factors Success (M\_3, M\_6) and Acquisition Centrality (M\_7, M\_10) of the Materialism scale were removed. The composition of the other scales was not altered, as results verified that all scales exhibited an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha \geq .70$ ). Results are presented in Table 3.29.

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Variance Explained</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
<u>Independent Measures</u>			
Review Valence	(81.42%)*		
<i>Positive Affect</i>	83.32% (61.95%)*	.93	4
<i>Negative Affect</i>	76.46% (19.48%)*	.69	2
Review Positiveness	94.40%	.94	2
Review Volume (1)	82.50%	.79	2
Review Volume (2)	90.90%	.90	2
Product Type	67.60%	.84	4
<u>Dependent Measures</u>			
Perceived Informative Value of Reviews	86.80%	.92	3
Perceived Persuasiveness	73.50%	.91	5
eWOM Effect	73.60%	.82	3
Attitude towards the Reviews	78.10%	.86	3
Information Adoption	75.30%	.88	4
Attitude towards the Product	88.20%	.97	5
Attitude towards the Brand	92.80%	.98	5
Conspicuous and Status Consumption	(71.79%)*		
<i>Conspicuous</i>	76.87% (19.94%)*	.85	3
<i>Status</i>	67.55% (51.86%)*	.84	4
Need for Uniqueness	67.80%	.95	10
Social Value	77.60%	.90	4
Purchase Intention	90.80%	.95	3
<u>Covariates</u>			
Product Involvement	67.90%	.91	6
Materialism	(70.59%)*		
<i>Success</i>	70.43% (16.09%)*	.58	2
<i>Acquisition Centrality</i>	74.24% (19.56%)*	.65	2
<i>Happiness</i>	67.24% (34.94%)*	.75	3
Interpersonal Influence	(69.22%)*		
<i>Social Belonging</i>	66.15% (47.03%)*	.90	6
<i>Social Learning</i>	72.61% (22.19%)*	.80	3

<b>Socio-demographic Measures</b>			
General Attitude towards Reviews	(73.37%)*		
<i>Decision-making</i>	76.61% (54.23%)*	.85	3
<i>Learning</i>	69.22% (19.14%)*	.75	3
General Attitude towards Online Reviews	69.70%	.78	3
Perceived Product Class Knowledge	69.70%	.89	5
Brand Familiarity	82.90%	.89	3
General Attitude towards Brand	74.00%	.88	4
Attitude towards Website	66.40%	.87	5
Perceived Source Trustworthiness	78.80%	.91	4

**Table 3.29: Scale Variance and Validity**

\*(variance explained as multi-factor scale)

### 3.6.2.1.1 Independent Measures

#### *Review Valence*

The Principle Component Analysis revealed that the six-item scale loaded onto two factors corresponding to Positive Affect (RV\_1, RV\_4, RV\_5, and RV\_6) and Negative Affect (RV\_2, RV\_3). From the results of Cronbach's alpha procedure, two items comprising the secondary factor of Review Valence (RV\_2 and RV\_3) were removed due to a low reliability score. Subsequently, the revised Review Valence scale consisted of four items, demonstrating a strong .93 reliability score.

#### *Review Volume (2)*

Principle Components Analysis resulted in one item being removed due to a low communality score (< .50) (RVol\_3), and accordingly this variable was removed. The remaining two items had good communality scores (> .90) and loaded onto a single factor that explained 90.90% of the variance.

#### *Product Type*

The analysis revealed a low communality score for one item (PT\_2) leading to its removal, where the resultant four-item scale accounted for 67.65% of the variance.

### 3.6.2.1.2 Dependent Measures

#### *Attitude towards the Product*

Analysis resulted in one item being removed due to a low communality score (AP\_5), and another item was removed for cross-loading on two factors (AP\_6). The subsequent five-item scale loaded onto a single factor and accounted for 88.20% of the variance.

### *Conspicuous and Status Consumption*

As a result of the analysis, five items were removed due to low communality scores that fell below the .50 acceptance criteria (CC\_1, CC\_2, CC\_6, CC\_10, and CC\_12). Subsequent analysis indicated that the scale items loaded onto two factors which are consistent with the original scale (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). However, one item was deleted due to cross-loading onto both factors (CC\_13). The remaining seven-item scale loaded onto two factors corresponding to Conspicuous Consumption (CC\_3, CC\_4, and CC\_5) and Status Consumption (CC\_7, CC\_8, CC\_9, and CC\_11). Overall, these two factors explained 19.94% and 51.86% of the variance respectively (as indicated in Table 3.29).

### *Need for Uniqueness*

Subsequent to the analysis, one item was removed for low communality (NU\_6). The remaining items loaded onto a single factor. The ten-item scale accounted for 67.80% of the variance.

#### **3.6.2.1.3 Covariate Measures**

### *Product Involvement*

The Principle Component Analysis resulted in one item being removed for low communality (PI\_9). A further three items were removed for cross-loading onto two factors (PI\_3, PI\_4, and PI\_7). The remaining items loaded onto a single factor, whereby the resultant six-item scale explained 67.90% of the variance.

### *Materialism*

Analysis of the original 18-item scale for Success, Acquisition Centrality, and Happiness initially produced four factors. Within those four factors, Success and Happiness were individual factors while two distinct factors comprised Acquisition Centrality. Conceptually, a four-factor materialism paradigm is not supported in the literature (Richins, 2004; Richins and Dawson, 1992), and considering that the secondary Acquisition Centrality factor was supported by one significant item (M\_9), this item was removed. In subsequent analyses, low communality scores resulted in the removal of six items (M2, M4, M11, M12, M14, and M16). Furthermore, cross-loading factors led to the removal of two items (M1, M5, M8, and M13). The remaining items loaded onto three factors corresponding to Success (M\_3 and M\_6), Acquisition Centrality (M\_7 and M\_10), and Happiness (M\_15, M\_17, and M\_18). The resultant three factors explained 16.09%, 19.56%, and 34.94% of the variance respectively (as mentioned in Table 3.29).

### *Interpersonal Influence*

Analysis of the 12-item scale for Interpersonal Influence resulted in two items being removed for low communality (II\_1 and II\_3), and another item was removed for cross-loading factors (II\_6).

The remaining items loaded onto two factors that explained 47.03% and 22.19%, corresponding to Social Belonging (II\_2, II\_4, II\_9, II\_10, II\_11, and II\_12) and Social Learning (II\_5, II\_7, and II\_8).

#### **3.6.2.1.4 Socio-demographic Measures**

##### ***General Attitude towards Reviews***

Interestingly, Principle Component Analysis indicated that the items loaded onto two factors corresponding to Decision-making (GAR\_1, GAR\_2, and GAR\_3) and Learning (GAR\_4, GAR\_5, and GAR\_6). These two factors in turn explained 54.23% and 19.14% of the variance, as indicated in Table 3.29.

##### ***General Attitude towards Online Reviews***

The Principle Component Analysis revealed a low communality score for one item (GAOR\_4) that was later removed. The resultant three-item scale loaded onto a single factor and explained 69.70% of the variance.

##### ***Attitude towards the Website***

As a result of the analysis, one item was discarded for a low communality score (AWeb\_5). The remaining five-item scale explained 66.40% of the variance.

#### **3.6.2.2 Manipulation Checks**

The pre-testing procedure used the scales measuring the perception of Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type as manipulation checks to ensure the experimental conditions were perceived as intended. Using the average scale means for each manipulation, one-way ANOVA and independent sample t-tests were used to determine if a significant ( $p < .05$ ) difference exists between means of the manipulated conditions. In addition, the pre-study indicated the most effective scales to measure the three variable manipulations, leading to the less effective ones being removed from the final questionnaire.

##### **4.6.2.2.1 Manipulation Check for Review Valence**

For review valence, two independent sample t-tests were used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the positively- and negatively-framed review conditions. First, the semantic-differential scale using four-items to measure review valence (Edell & Burke, 1987; Kim & Gupta, 2012) found that the message-framing conditions were successfully manipulated. The two means for Positive ( $\bar{x} = 5.14$ ) and Negative ( $\bar{x} = 2.10$ ) review conditions were significantly different ( $t = 23.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ) from one another. Given the neutral point (test value = 4), it is apparent that both levels of Review Valence are perceived as intended at opposite ends of the measurement scale (1 = “Very Dissatisfied”; 7 = “Very Satisfied”).

The second manipulation check based on the Review Positiveness scale adopted from Park and Lee (2008) reported results consistent with the previous check, where the mean scores between Positive ( $\bar{x} = 6.31$ ) and Negative ( $\bar{x} = 1.60$ ) review conditions were significantly different ( $t = 42.52$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and therefore, the manipulations were successful. A closer examination of the mean scores, reveals that this manipulation check reports a more distinguishable difference in means (mean difference = 4.71) for the two valence conditions, in comparison to the previous scale.

Overall, the two independent sample t-tests confirm that the Positive and Negative conditions of Review Valence are perceived by participants as significantly different. In addition, the two-item scale from Park and Lee (2008) was the most effective manipulation check in the pre-study. Since, this scale outperformed the other four-item scale (Edell & Burke, 1987; Kim & Gupta, 2012), identifying a larger mean difference between the two levels of Review Valence treatment. Accordingly, the two-item scale was selected as the manipulation check for the final study, and the other scale was removed from the questionnaire.

#### **4.6.2.2.2 Manipulation Check for Review Volume**

Two independent sample t-tests were conducted to test whether the High Volume and Low Volume manipulations for Review Volume were perceived as intended. First, for the manipulation check adopted from Park and Lee (2008), the independent sample t-test found a significant difference ( $t = 4.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between the mean scores of High Volume ( $\bar{x} = 4.30$ ) and Low Volume ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ), which indicates that the manipulations were successful with a mean difference of .71. As expected, the mean scores are situated close to the neutral point (test value = 4) as there are often differing opinions on what is perceived by others as a high or low volume of online reviews but, nevertheless, these conditions remain significantly different from one another. Moreover, despite the close proximity to the neutral point, both levels of Review Valence still represent the intended condition where the mean for High Volume ( $\bar{x} = 4.30$ ) is above the neutral point, and Low Volume ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ) is positioned below this point.

Consistent with these findings, the two-item scale derived from Zhang et al. (2014a) also found that review volume was successfully manipulated, indicating a significant difference ( $t = 6.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between the mean scores of the High Volume ( $\bar{x} = 4.70$ ) and the Low Volume ( $\bar{x} = 3.46$ ) conditions. Notably, the mean difference of 1.25 between conditions is much larger than the .71 mean differences for the previous scale, which indicates that this scale is a more effective manipulation check. Hence, the Zhang et al. (2014a) scale is included in the final study as the manipulation check for review volume, and subsequently, the Park and Lee (2008) scale is removed from further analysis.

#### 4.6.2.2.3 Manipulation Check for Product Type

For the Product Type manipulation check, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test whether the manipulated conditions of Non-Luxury, Mid-Luxury, and High-Luxury branded products were perceived as intended.

For the manipulation check on the Product Type scale (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), the ANOVA test revealed that there were some significant differences ( $F = 169.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between the Non-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.77$ ), Mid-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.02$ ), and High-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.20$ ) conditions. Levene Statistic showed that there was no significant difference ( $p = .26$ ) in variance between groups. The mean difference between Non-Luxury and Mid-Luxury was  $-2.25$  and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). The mean difference between Non-Luxury and High-Luxury was  $-2.42$  which was also statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). However, the mean difference between Mid-Luxury and High-Luxury was  $-.18$  and not significant ( $p = .47$ ). The findings indicate that consumers perceived the Non-Luxury product condition to be significantly different from other conditions, but were unable to distinguish a clear difference between the Mid-Luxury and High-Luxury product conditions. A closer examination of the means showed that the latter two conditions are viewed as intended, positioned above the neutral point (test point = 4) on the luxury end of the scale.

Given that the pre-study sample consisted of value-driven students, a difference between the Mid-Luxury and High-Luxury product is more likely to be apparent in the more diverse sample used in the final study. Accordingly, despite there being an insignificant difference between these the Mid-Luxury and High-Luxury conditions, the stimuli is not altered for the final study. Since, it is likely that the undergraduate sample is stimulating confound effects. The characteristic low income of the student population suggests they lack the means to purchase luxury brands, and therefore, are less familiar with such products and in turn are less capable of effectively distinguishing between the lower- and upper-tiers of the luxury market (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Kapferer, 2006).

### 3.7 EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

#### 3.7.1 Recruitment of Respondents

Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for the final data collection. To control for gender differences, females were selected to participate in the study due to the likelihood of being more susceptible to the influence of the variables addressed, for example, luxury consumption (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013), interpersonal influence (Meyers-Levy, 1988) and online reviews (Bae & Lee, 2011). A pre-screening feature required participants to confirm that they were female prior to proceeding with the experiment. Accordingly, it formed the resultant



female, North American sample. Given that this research is not testing culturally-specific theories, the subsequent North American sample was appropriate.

Qualifiers for the study remained the same as the pre-test. Utilizing the MTurk prescreening feature, the experiment was made accessible to those who have earned a high task approval rate (greater than 98%) and females aged 18 to 45 years. The online experiment was conducted on Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Using the randomizer on Qualtrics, approximately 40 participants were randomly assigned to one of the twelve experimental conditions. A sample size with at least 480 responses was sought to minimize sampling error, while providing a buffer against any potential omissions for invalid or incomplete questionnaires.

Furthermore, a minimum age requirement of 18 years was set for the study as it was assumed that younger individuals tend to have low incomes and are dependents, and therefore, have limited opportunities to acquire luxury products (Schade et al., 2016). A maximum age of 45 years was imposed, since older consumers are more reluctant to shop online which manifests in a perceived greater risk and the lack of user experience with the medium (Trocchia & Janda, 2000). While there are minor differences between the existing age groups, older consumers, however, are likely to introduce greater variation into the study. Accordingly, besides the prescreening question, a second control was integrated for age and gender in the demographics section of the questionnaire.

A diverse sample that was more representative of the general population was required for final data collection, in order to improve of the validity of research results. The undergraduate student sample was appropriate for the pre-study, however, the limited age range and characteristic price sensitivity among students will restrict the findings of the study. The diverse sample recruited through Mechanical Turk will provide a range across income, education, and age (Berinsky et al., 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010).

As an incentive, participants were offered USD \$2.50 for their completion of the questionnaire with an estimated time commitment of ten minutes. Given that participation rates were sensitive to payment amount and time investments (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), the compensation rate was competitive to recruit participants in a prompt, timely manner. The Mechanical Turk service was able to withhold payment, allowing participants with unsuitable responses to be removed and not remunerated. Several mechanisms were implemented to ensure the responses were high quality and met the demographic criteria. The pre-screening question required participants to confirm they meet the demographic qualifiers, and a second control measure for gender and age was integrated into the demographic questions. Moreover, participants who violated the two

attention checks were removed. In addition, those with survey completion times below seven minutes or exhibiting systematic responses were excluded from the final dataset.

Data was collected over the period commencing on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and concluding on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2015. Over that time period, 571 participants completed the survey.

### **3.7.2 Ethical Considerations**

The current study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. The proposed research was reviewed and received approval by the Committee prior to data collection, refer to Appendix 7.4. To ensure the ethical code was upheld, this research included two Information Sheets for the pre-study and final experiment (see Appendices 7.2.1 and 7.4.1). These Information Sheets outlined the broad objective of the studies, what participation involves in relation to task overview and time commitments, and the confidentiality of their responses. Subjects were not provided the full purpose of research prior to participation as such knowledge may have influenced their responses (Orne, 1962), rather, a full disclosure statement was provided upon completion of the questionnaire (refer to Appendix 7.3.6).

Moreover, for the pre-study, participants were asked to provide their student email addresses to be eligible to enter the prize draw. Such information was used solely for the purpose of randomly selecting the prize winners and would remain confidential. For the final experiment, participants were sourced through Mechanical Turk which ensured anonymity as personal identifiers did not accompany the collected data. Finally, subjects were required to complete an informed consent statement prior to participating in the experiment (see Appendices 7.2.1 and 7.4.1), where the estimated task-completion time was outlined and the respective remuneration rate disclosed. Upon reading the Information Sheet, the participants were to confirm that they agreed to participate in the research, they understood their rights to withdraw at any time prior to completion, and the potential publication of research results. The informed consent allowed the opportunity for respondents to select 'No thanks' and exit the questionnaire.

## **3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided an overview of the quantitative research methodology adopted to test the proposed hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three. First, the research and experimental design adopted are explained. Second, the selection of sunglasses as the focal product was justified and the development of the simulated *Amazon.com* webpage as the host platform for the online reviews was discussed. Next, the manipulated levels of the independent variables were outlined. Fourth, the experimental procedure was explained in a task-orientated manner, detailing the role of

involvement for participants in the questionnaire. Fifth, the pre-study was carried out and the results confirmed that Review Valence and Review Volume were successfully manipulated, while the Product Type manipulations were working enough to proceed with the final data collection. A few adjustments were made to the final questionnaire in accordance with the scale dimensionality and reliability results of the pre-test. Finally, the respondent recruitment procedure and ethical considerations were provided. The next chapter provides an overview of the results and analyses of the final experiment.

## 4. RESULTS

The following chapter aims to present an overview of the statistical analyses used to test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three. First, the size and composition of the research sample are discussed. Second, the scales used to measure each construct are assessed in relation to their dimensionality and reliability. Next, the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations for review valence, review volume, and product type are examined. Subsequently, the proposed hypotheses are tested in order to determine the effects of the independent variables.

### 4.1 SAMPLE SIZE AND COMPOSITION

#### 4.1.1 Sample Size

As mentioned in Section 4.7.1, the data collection for the final experiment occurred over the duration of 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015 through to 12<sup>th</sup> December 2015. A total of 571 respondents were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk.

All of the respondents gave their consent upon reading the Information Sheet to participate in the experiment. Each respondent verified themselves as adhering to the demographic qualifiers, a female aged between eighteen and forty-five, and were subsequently granted access to the online questionnaire. Moreover, two attention checks were integrated into fourth section of the questionnaire (refer to Section 3.5.4 and 3.5.5). A total of thirty-seven responses were deleted due to participants failing the attention checks. Specifically, nine responses failed to select 'Strongly Agree' and twenty-eight were removed in the latter attention check asking participants to select 'Strongly Disagree'.

Prior to commencing the statistical analyses, the data was screened to ensure responses were of a high quality. Twelve respondents indicated their gender was male in the demographics section, and therefore, violated the recruitment criteria and were excluded. Three participants also reported being over forty-five years of age which was outside the qualifying age bracket for participation. As a result, fifteen responses were withdrawn for failing to meet the demographic qualifiers (i.e., age and gender requirements for the study).

Twenty-seven respondents were removed for unrealistic completion times for the questionnaire of less than seven minutes. Such criterion was imposed to ensure respondents were attentive and reading the questions, as those with lower completion times appeared to use systematic responses.

Accordingly, the resultant sample consisted of 492 participants. To obtain the required equal sample sizes for each of the twelve experimental conditions necessary to realise the statistical assumptions, sixty responses were randomly deleted. The final sample consisted of 36 responses per condition, a total of 432 participants.

#### **4.1.2 Sample Composition**

The distribution of sociodemographic characteristics in the sample were analysed and the results are presented in Table 4.1. The age distribution of respondents within the 18 to 45 age bracket was relatively even for the middle age groups (31 to 35; 36 to 40) with 22.90% and 21.80% respectively, although it peaked at 25.90% for those aged 26 to 30. There was less representation in the sample for individuals aged 25 or younger (14.40%) and for the older age group (41 to 45) with 15.00%. Furthermore, over half of respondents were working full-time (58.10%) with a mere 4.40% identifying themselves as students, which is a substantial difference from the pre-study and indicative of the greater diversity of participants comprising the main study. A large proportion of the sample (81.50%) indicated that they were in either the lower or middle third income bracket in the general population. The sample appeared to be well educated, since the majority of respondents (52.30%) had completed a tertiary education, while a further 12.50% of the total sample had completed postgraduate qualifications. In relation to usage of online review websites, a largely one-sided response (90.70%) was recorded with the vast majority having consulted such websites in the last three months. Finally, 73.80% of respondents were frequent users of sunglasses, while 5.60% never use sunglasses.

<b><i>Demographic Variable</i></b>	<b><i>Category</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage</i></b>
<i>Age</i>	18 to 25	14.40%
	26 to 30	25.90%
	31 to 35	22.90%
	36 to 40	21.80%
	41 to 45	15.00%
<i>Employment</i>	Student	4.40%
	Full-time work	58.10%
	Part-time work	19.70%
	Retired	1.20%
	Unemployed	16.70%
<i>Perceived Income</i>	Lower third	28.70%
	Middle third	52.80%
	Upper third	8.30%
	Unsure	7.20%
	Rather not say	3.00%
<i>Education</i>	Primary school	.20%
	High school or equivalent	35.00%
	University	52.30%
	Master's Degree (MS)	10.20%
	Doctoral Degree (PhD)	1.40%
	Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)	0.90%
<i>Consulted Online Review Website (Last three months)</i>	Yes	90.70%
	No	9.30%
<i>General Use of Sunglasses</i>	Never	5.60%
	Rarely	20.60%
	Sometimes	28.00%
	Often	27.50%
	All of the time	18.30%

**Table 4.1: Demographic Sample Composition**

#### ***4.1.2.1 Socio-demographic Measures***

A number of socio-demographic variables were included to provide a greater insight into the sample, the effect of these construct measures was largely descriptive in nature. The general attitude towards reviews was measured, since it was imperative to check the extent to which participants would consider product information derived from the online reviews in their decision-making. The distribution of General Attitude towards Online Reviews (Park and Lee, 2008) is negatively skewed (-1.08) with a high central peak at the mean ( $\bar{x}$  = 6.17), indicating that the vast majority of participants had a strong positive attitude towards reviews. Similarly, the secondary factors of Decision-Making and Learning, pertaining to General Attitude towards Reviews construct (Khare et al., 2011), were both negatively skewed with -1.72 and -.92 respectively. The Decision-Making factor had a high kurtosis (4.67), which represents a large proportion of the sample peaked

at a mean score of 6.53. These results provide further empirical support that participants were predisposed to use online reviews to assist with their purchase decision. Moreover, Perceived Product Class Knowledge had a relatively flat normal distribution (Skewness = .16; Kurtosis = -.94) with a mean score of 3.65, which is indicative of participants having an overall neutral perception of their knowledge on the sunglasses product category. Accordingly, the sample will be open-minded to new information.

Furthermore, respondent awareness of the brands and their associated preferences were measured. It was important to determine if the brands were recognised, and the relative attitudes (either positive or negative) expressed towards the individual brands. In regards to Brand Familiarity, the relatively unknown Duduma brand elicited an unbranded effect ( $\bar{x} = 1.67$ ) as expected, while RayBan ( $\bar{x} = 4.91$ ) and Prada ( $\bar{x} = 4.49$ ) evoked a sense of familiarity amid participants. Likewise, General Attitude towards the Brand illustrated that the sample held a neutral attitude towards Duduma ( $\bar{x} = 3.51$ ) since it was relatively unknown. However, participants had moderately positive attitudes towards RayBan ( $\bar{x} = 5.21$ ) and Prada ( $\bar{x} = 5.14$ ), identifying the brands as associative with high quality and pleasure to a reasonable extent.

The descriptive statistics for Attitude towards the Website and Perceived Source Trustworthiness illustrate how the sample perceived the *Amazon.com* e-retailer website. The results show that, in general, participants exhibited a positive attitude towards *Amazon.com* with a mean score of 6.43 (Skewness = -1.37; Kurtosis = 2.73). The distribution of Perceived Source Trustworthiness had a negative skew (-1.34) with a high peak at the mean score of 5.72 (Kurtosis = 4.25), which infers the sample had a strong acuity towards *Amazon.com* being a trustworthy source for online reviews. Accordingly, participants were more likely to consider the contrived online sentiments in the experiment as sincere, dependable, and trustworthy, due to such connotations being reinforced by *Amazon.com*.

## 4.2 SCALE STRUCTURE AND RELIABILITY

Consistent with the pre-study, the structure and reliability (internal consistency) of the measurement scales were tested using Principle Component Analysis and Cronbach's (1951) alpha procedure, respectively. The results of such analyses are reported, followed by each of the scales being examined for non-normality and contamination from outliers by conducting tests for skewness and kurtosis.

#### 4.2.1 Scale Structure

Principle Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was used to assess the dimensionality of the scales featured in the questionnaire. For these analyses, scale items with a communality score less than .50 were deleted. Coefficients less than .30 were suppressed and items were deemed as cross-loading if the item was equally loading on two or more factors.

##### 4.2.1.1 Independent Measures

The three independent variables were measured to perform as manipulation checks.

###### *Review Valence*

The two items, taken from Park and Lee (2008), assessing the positivity of reviews had high communality scores (>.90) and loaded onto a single factor that explained 97.64% of the variance.

###### *Review Volume*

Analysis of the two items adapted from the Zhang et al. (2014a) scale had equal communality scores of .97 and loaded onto one factor. The scale explained 96.83% of the variance.

###### *Product Type*

The four items pertaining to the level of perceived luxury associated with the target product had communality scores between .69 and .89. All items loaded onto a single factor and accounted for 78.28% of the variance.

##### 4.2.1.2 Dependent Measures

###### *Perceived Informative Value of Reviews*

The Principal Component Analysis revealed that all three items had high communality scores (>.80) and loaded onto a single factor that explained 88.89% of the variance.

###### *Perceived Persuasiveness*

The five original items for Perceived Persuasiveness had high communality scores above .80, apart from one item with a lower score of .66. The five-item scale loaded onto one factor and accounted for 81.55% of the variance.

###### *eWOM Effect*

Analysis revealed that the three items had high communality scores between .69 and .83, loading onto a single factor that accounted for 76.64% of the variance.

###### *Attitude towards the Reviews*

The Principle Component Analysis revealed that all items had high communality scores (>.70) and loaded onto a single factor. The three-item scale explained 82.28% of the variance.



### *Information Adoption*

The original four items to measure Information Adoption had communality scores between .61 and .77. The four-item scale loaded onto one factor and explained 69.90% of the variance.

### *Attitude towards the Product*

The shortened five-item scale developed in the pre-test had particularly high communality scores (>.90) and loaded onto a single factor. The five items explained 96.67% of the variance.

### *Attitude towards the Brand*

Analysis of the five items revealed high communality scores above .90 and a one factor loading across the board. The five-item scale explained 97.59% of the variance.

### *Conspicuous and Status Consumption*

The seven items representing conspicuous and status consumption tendencies had high communality scores (>.80). Consistent with the pre-test, the items loaded onto two distinctive factors corresponding to Conspicuous Consumption (CC\_3, CC\_4, and CC\_5) and Status Consumption (CC\_7, CC\_8, CC\_9, and CC\_11). All items had high factor loadings (>.80). The two factor solution explained 14.71% and 72.81% of the variance, respectively. Hence, a cumulative score of 87.52% for variance explained.

### *Need for Uniqueness*

The ten items for Need for Uniqueness were found to have high communality scores between .79 and .91. The single factor explained 84.95% of the variance.

### *Social Value*

Analysis of the four-item scale recognised that all items had high communality scores (>.80) and loaded onto one factor that accounted for 87.42% of the variance.

### *Purchase Intention*

The three items for Purchase Intentions had high communality scores above .9 and loaded onto one factor which accounted for 95.88% of the variance.

## **4.2.1.3 Covariates**

### *Product Involvement*

Analysis revealed that the six items for Product Involvement have communality scores that range from .69 to .80. All items loaded onto a single factor which explained 74.59% of the variance.

### *Materialism*

The three-item scale had high communality scores (>.80) and loaded onto a single factor pertaining to Happiness (M\_15, M\_17, M\_18). Overall, the three items explained 85.88% of the variance.

### *Interpersonal Influence*

The nine items representing Interpersonal Influence had communality scores between .63 and .86. The items loaded onto two distinctive factors consistent with the pre-test, corresponding to Social Belonging (II\_2, II\_4, II\_9, II\_10, II\_11, and II\_12) and Social Learning (II\_5, II\_7, and II\_8). These components of Interpersonal Influence explained 58.56% and 19.13% of the variance, respectively. Overall, 77.69% of the variance was explained by the two factors.

#### **4.2.1.4 Socio-demographic Measures**

### *General Attitude towards Online Reviews*

The resultant three item scale shortened in the pre-test had communality scores between .60 and .77. All three items loaded onto one factor and explained 68.63% of the variance.

### *General Attitude towards Reviews*

The original six item scale taken from Khare et al. (2011) loaded onto two factors. Cross-loading resulted in the removal of one item (GAR\_6). Following this adjustment, communality scores for the remaining items were above .70. The two factor solution identified in the pre-test explained 55.48% and 21.67% of the variance, respectively. Items GAR\_1, GAR\_2, and GAR\_3 represented a factor denoted as 'Decision-making,' while items GAR\_4 and GAR\_5 represented 'Learning'. Overall, the two factors accounted for 77.15% of the total variance.

### *Perceived Product Class Knowledge*

Analysis of the five items indicated communality scores between .61 and .88, where these items loaded onto one factor. The five-item scale accounted for 79.03% of the variance.

### *Brand Familiarity*

The three items pertaining to brand familiarity loaded onto a single factor with high communality scores (>.80) and the scale explained 85.69% of the variance.

### *General Attitude towards the Brand*

The Principal Component Analysis revealed that the original four-item scale had communality scores ranging from .68 to .92. All items loaded onto one factor and explained 84.27% of the variance.

### *Attitude towards the Website*

Originally a five-item scale, the analyses indicated a low communality score for one item (AWeb\_1) and accordingly this variable was removed. The remaining items had communality scores between .52 and .84. The resultant four items loaded onto a single factor and accounted for 69.71% of the variance.

### *Perceived Source Trustworthiness*

The four-item scale representing source trustworthiness had high communality scores ( $>.80$ ) and loaded onto one factor, where it explained 85.91% of the variance.

#### **4.2.2 Scale Reliability**

Subsequent to Principal Component Analysis, the measurement scales were tested for internal consistency (reliability) using Cronbach's alpha procedure. Such analyses suggested that five items be removed to improve the internal reliability of the composite score derived from the scales. The scales of concern were Perceived Persuasiveness, Attitude towards the Reviews, General Attitude towards the Brand, Attitude towards the Website, and the Social Learning factor of Interpersonal Influence. Consequently, items PP\_4, AR\_2, ABrand\_2, AWeb\_6, and II\_5 were removed, since these items exhibited a low item-total correlation compared to the other scale items. Hence, removal of these items returned a higher Cronbach alpha value for the scales. The composition of the other scales was not altered. Table 4.2 shows the Cronbach's alpha values which indicate that all scales had an acceptable level of reliability ( $\alpha > .70$ ), with one exception. The Learning factor for General Attitude towards Reviews produced a low reliability score of .60. Accordingly, caution should be exercised when interpreting analysis related to this variable.

In regards to the removal of scale items, the initial reliability score of .94 for Perceived Persuasiveness (5-item scale) could be improved by removing one item (PP\_4), which had a lower item-total correlation of .73 compared to the other four items ( $>.85$ ). Subsequent removal of this item increased the Cronbach alpha to .95 for the adjusted scale. Moreover, a lower correlation of .70 for a scale item (AR\_2) relative to other items ( $>.80$ ) constituting the Attitudes towards the Reviews (3-items) construct led to its removal, which in turn increased the initial Cronbach alpha from .89 to .92. Additionally, removal of Abrand\_2 for General Attitude towards the Brand (4 items), due to a low item-total correlation of .72 relative to other items ( $>.85$ ), produced a greater internal reliability of .96, an improvement from the initial .94 alpha. For Attitude towards the Website (4 items), the preliminary alpha of .83 was improved by removing one item (AWeb\_6) due to its lower item-total correlation (.56) compared to the three residual items ( $>.60$ ), which resulted in an alpha of .87. Finally, the opening Cronbach alpha of .84 for the Social Learning factor of Interpersonal Influence (3 items) was improved by removing one item (II\_5), due to a lower correlation of .59 than other items ( $>.75$ ). Subsequently, the resultant two-item factor had an internal reliability score of .90.

Scale	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
<u>Independent Measures</u>		
Review Valence	.98	2
Review Volume	.97	2
Product Type	.91	4
<u>Dependent Measures</u>		
Perceived Informative Value	.94	3
Perceived Persuasiveness	.95	4
eWOM Effect	.85	3
Attitude towards the Reviews	.92	2
Information Adoption	.85	4
Attitude towards the Product	.99	5
Attitude towards the Brand	.99	5
Conspicuous and Status Consumption		
<i>Conspicuous Consumption</i>	.94	3
<i>Status Consumption</i>	.94	4
Need for Uniqueness	.98	10
Social Value	.95	4
Purchase Intention	.98	3
<u>Covariate Measures</u>		
Product Involvement	.93	6
Materialism	.92	3
Interpersonal Influence		
<i>Social Belonging</i>	.94	6
<i>Social Learning</i>	.90	2
<u>Socio-demographic Measures</u>		
General Attitude towards Reviews		
<i>Decision-making</i>	.84	3
<i>Learning</i>	.60	2
General Attitude towards Online Reviews	.76	3
Perceived Product Class Knowledge	.93	5
Brand Familiarity	.92	3
General Attitude towards the Brand	.96	3
Attitude towards the Website	.87	3
Perceived Source Trustworthiness	.95	4

**Table 4.2: Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficients for Total Scale Variables**

### 4.2.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each scale and are presented in Table 4.3. Presented in the table is the mean and standard deviation for individual scales, supplemented with skewness and kurtosis scores as indicators of the mean distribution shape. The results show that the independent variables had relatively flat distributions with a lower, broader central peak, as indicated by negative kurtosis scores between  $-.95$  and  $-1.90$ . In relation to the dependent measures, the mean distribution was highly skewed to the left ( $< -1$ ) for Perceived Informative Value, Perceived Persuasiveness, eWOM Effect and Attitude towards the Reviews, indicating a strong positive response from participants to these constructs. Such findings are further supported by the high kurtosis scores ( $> 1$ ), highlighting a high, sharp peak at the mean. Furthermore, Need for Uniqueness and Purchase Intention had a moderate, positive skew with scores between  $.50$  and  $1$  (Bulmer, 1979), which is indicative of a negative attitude to these variables. In addition, four dependent variables had negative kurtosis scores ( $< -1$ ) which is reflective of a flat, broad distribution. Three covariates had a moderate, negative skew ( $-.55$ ,  $-.64$  and  $-.83$ ) that shows a minor positive effect. The descriptive nature of the socio-demographics is mentioned above, refer to Section 4.1.2.1.

Scale	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
<u>Independent Measures</u>				
Review Valence	3.90	2.71	.00	-1.90
Review Volume	4.28	1.99	-.24	-1.31
Product Type	4.55	1.83	-.50	-.95
<u>Dependent Measures</u>				
Perceived Informative Value	5.81	1.14	-1.59	3.15
Perceived Persuasiveness	5.70	1.17	-1.38	2.15
eWOM Effect	5.86	1.00	-1.53	3.28
Attitude towards the Reviews	6.10	1.13	-1.85	4.09
Information Adoption	6.09	.76	-.89	.90
Attitude towards the Product	3.68	2.47	.13	-1.77
Attitude towards the Brand	4.22	2.18	-.30	-1.41
Conspicuous and Status Consumption				
<i>Conspicuous Consumption</i>	3.26	1.67	.20	-.99
<i>Status Consumption</i>	4.18	1.85	-.37	-1.11
Need for Uniqueness	2.91	1.62	.52	-.90
Social Value	3.35	1.68	.17	-1.10
Purchase Intention	2.69	2.03	.86	-.78
<u>Covariates</u>				
Product Involvement	5.00	1.26	-.64	.63
Materialism	4.49	1.73	-.55	-.72
Interpersonal Influence				
<i>Social Belonging</i>	2.83	1.45	.51	-.74
<i>Social Learning</i>	4.69	1.53	-.83	.01
<u>Socio-demographic Variables</u>				
General Attitude towards Online Reviews	6.17	.73	-1.08	1.63
General Attitude towards Reviews				
<i>Decision-Making</i>	6.53	.61	-1.72	4.67
<i>Learning</i>	5.75	1.00	-.97	1.74
Perceived Product Class Knowledge	3.65	1.49	.16	-.94
Brand Familiarity	3.69	1.93	-.16	-1.38
General Attitude towards the Brand	4.62	1.67	-.75	-.39
Attitude towards the Website	6.43	.66	-1.37	2.73
Perceived Source Trustworthiness	5.72	.89	-1.34	4.25

**Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for Total Scale Variables**

### 4.3 MANIPULATION CHECKS

As identified in Chapter Three, the more effective scales for measuring perceptions of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type were used as manipulation checks for the main experiment. Comparisons of the mean scores and standard deviations between the pre-test and main study are presented in Table 4.4, Table 4.5 and Table 4.6. In addition, the composite mean score for each scale is also included and the Cronbach's alpha scores.

The mean score and reliability score increased for all the manipulation checks from the pre-test to the main study, however, there was one exception. Despite an increase in internal reliability, the mean score for Review Valence decreased between the pre-test and the main study.

		Pre-Test		Main Study	
<i>Scale Item</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>
<u>Review Valence</u>					
RP_1	Overall, the online reviews positively evaluate the product	4.13	2.58	3.98	2.76
RP_2	Most of the online reviews recommend buying the product	3.94	2.63	3.81	2.73
Total Scale		4.04	2.53	3.90	2.71
Cronbach's Alpha		.94		.98	

**Table 4.4: Review Valence Factor Mean Scores**

		Pre-Test		Main Study	
<i>Scale Item</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>
<u>Review Volume</u>					
RVol_1	Many consumers have posted reviews about the sunglasses	4.12	1.69	4.33	2.00
RVol_2	The sunglasses have a large number of online reviews	3.99	1.69	4.24	2.03
Total Scale		4.05	1.61	4.28	1.99
Cronbach's Alpha		.90		.97	

**Table 4.5: Review Volume Factor Mean Scores**

<i>Scale Item</i>		<b>Pre-Test</b>		<b>Main Study</b>	
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>
<u>Product Type</u>					
PT_1	Affordable/ Extremely expensive	4.47	2.00	4.52	2.25
PT_3	Not prestigious/ Prestigious	4.22	1.80	4.49	2.16
PT_4	Literal/ Symbolic	4.54	1.59	4.68	1.88
PT_5	Ordinary/ Distinctive	4.00	1.86	4.50	2.01
Total Scale		4.31	1.49	4.55	1.83
Cronbach's Alpha		.84		.91	

**Table 4.6: Product Type Factor Mean Scores**

To determine the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations, a one-way ANOVA and two separate independent samples t-tests were conducted. Using the scale means for each manipulation check, the one-way ANOVA and t-tests were used to determine whether there were significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences between each of the experimental condition levels present.

For Review Valence, the independent sample t-test revealed a significant difference ( $t = 81.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between the Positive and Negative conditions (refer to Table 4.7). The mean difference between the Positive review ( $\bar{x} = 6.52$ ) and Negative review ( $\bar{x} = 1.27$ ) conditions was 5.25, a statistically significant difference ( $p = .00$ ). The evaluative direction of the online reviews was perceived as intended, where the manipulated levels of Review Valence are scored as polar opposites of the seven-point scale.

<b>Sample Statistics</b>					
<b>Review Valence</b>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>Significance</i>
<b>Positive</b>	6.52	.63	81.73	5.25	.00
<b>Negative</b>	1.27	.70			

**Table 4.7: Manipulation Check for Review Valence (Park and Lee, 2008)**

A significant difference ( $t = 17.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was identified in means between the Review Volume conditions High ( $\bar{x} = 5.56$ ) and Low ( $\bar{x} = 3.00$ ) from the independent sample t-test (as illustrated in Table 4.8). The total mean difference was 2.56 with a significance value of  $p = .00$ . Based on these results, the manipulation for these conditions is successful. A closer examination of the means showed that both conditions were viewed as intended, where high volume is positioned above the neutral point (test point = 4) and low volume is below this neutral point on a seven-point scale.



<b>Sample Statistics</b>					
<b>Review Valence</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Mean difference</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>High</b>	5.56	1.37	17.55	2.56	.00
<b>Low</b>	3.00	1.65			

**Table 4.8: Manipulation Check for Review Volume (Zhang et al., 2014)**

For the Product Type manipulation, the one-way ANOVA test revealed that there was significant differences ( $F = 305.46$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ) between the Non-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.58$ ), Mid-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.40$ ), and High-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.67$ ) conditions (refer to Table 4.9). Levene's test showed that there was no significant difference ( $p = .14$ ) in variance between groups. The mean difference between Non-Luxury and Mid-Luxury was  $-2.84$  and statistically significant ( $p = .00$ ). A mean difference of  $-3.12$  between the Non-Luxury and High-Luxury conditions had a significant score of  $p = .00$ . Consistent with the pre-test, the mean difference between Mid-Luxury and High-Luxury was  $-.27$  and not significant ( $p = .13$ ).

The findings indicate that participants perceived the Non-Luxury product as intended, where the composite mean is positioned below the neutral point (test-point = 4) on the four-item scale towards adjectives of affordable, popular, literal, and ordinary associated with non-luxury (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). In comparison, both luxury manipulations were positioned above the neutral point towards the luxury connotations, where the Mid-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.40$ ) product is deemed to be less congruent to these luxury attributes than the High-Luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.67$ ) product. Such results reveal that the three levels of Product Type are perceived as intended, however, the difference between Mid-Luxury and High-Luxury conditions is perceived to be insignificant.

<u>Descriptives</u>			
<i>Product Type condition</i>	<i>Mean</i>		<i>Standard deviation</i>
Non-Luxury (Duduma)	2.58		1.22
Mid-Luxury brand (RayBan)	5.40		1.11
High-Luxury brand (Prada)	5.67		1.21
<u>Homogeneity of Variances</u>			
<i>Levene Statistic</i>	2.00	<i>Significance</i>	.14
<u>ANOVA (Between Groups)</u>			
<i>F-value</i>	305.46	<i>Significance</i>	.00
<u>Multiple Comparisons</u>			
<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>		<i>Significance</i>
Non-Luxury – Mid-Luxury	-2.84		.00
Non-Luxury – High-Luxury	-3.12		.00
Mid-Luxury – High-Luxury	-.27		.13

**Table 4.9: Manipulation Check for Product Type (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004)**

## 4.4 HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Following the manipulation checks, several between-subjects factorial analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were performed to determine the effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on each dependent variable. Adjustment was provided by four covariates: Product Involvement, Materialism, and the secondary factors of Interpersonal Influence, namely, Social Learning and Social Belonging. The three-way ANCOVA procedure analysed the main, interaction, and covariate effects at the  $\alpha = .05$  level. Partial  $\eta^2$  values were calculated to ascertain the effect sizes of each independent variable on the dependent variable under examination. The results of the ANCOVA analysis for each dependent variable are detailed in the preceding sections.

### 4.4.1 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Informative Value

As proposed in Chapter Three, Hypothesis One outlined that Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type would affect the Perceived Informative Value of the review set. To examine this hypothesis, the three independent variables were entered as fixed factors into a 2×2×3 between subjects factorial ANCOVA, where Product Involvement, Materialism, Social Learning and Social Belonging were included as covariates to control for any confounding effects. The descriptives and results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.10 and Table 4.11.

			Perceived Informative Value	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	5.50	1.63
		Low	5.65	.89
	Negative	High	6.33	.59
		Low	6.07	.76
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.61	1.07
		Low	5.36	1.17
	Negative	High	6.19	.72
		Low	6.09	.83
High-Luxury	Positive	High	5.72	1.04
		Low	4.69	1.73
	Negative	High	6.18	.79
		Low	6.31	.71
Total			5.81	1.14

**Table 4.10: Perceived Informative Value of Reviews across Experimental Conditions**

Variable	Perceived Informative Value		
	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
Product Involvement	35.21	.00	.08
Materialism	1.12	.29	.00
Social Learning	.07	.79	.00
Social Belonging	.52	.47	.00
Product Type	.37	.69	.00
Review Valence	84.28	.00	.17
Review Volume	3.72	.06	.01
Product Type*Review Valence	1.37	.26	.01
Product Type*Review Volume	1.27	.28	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	2.17	.14	.01
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	4.25	.02	.02

**Table 4.11: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Perceived Informative Value**

The results show that the interaction effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type had a significant influence on the Perceived Informative Value of the available reviews ( $F = 4.25, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ). Review Valence yielded a strong significant main effect ( $F = 84.28, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .17$ ), although the main effects of Review Volume and Product Type were not significant ( $F = 3.72, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .01$  and  $F = .37, p = .69, \eta_p^2 = .00$ , respectively). The latter results indicate that different levels of Review Volume and Product Type do not cause a variation in Perceived Informative Value. A closer examination of the mean Perceived Informative Value for Review Valence was performed to interpret the significant main effect, indicating that positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 5.42$ ) have a significantly lower perceived informative value than negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.19$ ). Furthermore, the product involvement covariate indicated a strong significant adjustment for perceived informative value ( $F = 35.21, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .08$ ), while the remaining three covariates produced no significant effect. Overall, there was empirical evidence that supported Hypothesis One.

#### 5.4.2 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Persuasiveness

Hypothesis Two proposed that there was an interaction effect between Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type on Perceived Persuasiveness. To test this hypothesis, a factorial ANCOVA was undertaken, which included the four covariates from the previous analysis to determine any confounding effects. The results of such analyses are presented in Table 4.12 and Table 4.13.

			Perceived Persuasiveness	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	5.31	1.70
		Low	5.49	1.05
	Negative	High	6.20	.83
		Low	6.13	.73
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.46	1.06
		Low	5.17	1.39
	Negative	High	6.15	.69
		Low	6.01	.72
High-Luxury	Positive	High	5.32	1.24
		Low	4.87	1.49
	Negative	High	6.17	.78
		Low	6.13	.74
Total			5.70	1.17

**Table 4.12: Perceived Persuasiveness of Reviews across Experimental Conditions**

Perceived Persuasiveness			
Variable	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
Product Involvement	33.04	.00	.07
Materialism	.30	.59	.00
Social Learning	1.80	.18	.00
Social Belonging	.16	.69	.00
Product Type	.36	.70	.00
Review Valence	95.71	.00	.19
Review Volume	.94	.33	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	.66	.52	.00
Product Type*Review Volume	1.19	.31	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	.16	.69	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	.62	.54	.00

**Table 4.13: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Perceived Persuasiveness**

From the analysis, it is evident that the underlying Product Involvement dimension had a significant effect ( $F = 33.04$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ ) on the dependent variable, Perceived Persuasiveness, that was controlled. However, all other covariates produced no significant effect ( $p > .05$ ). Furthermore, the results show a significant main effect of Review Valence was present ( $F = 95.71$ ,  $p = .00$ ) that was moderate ( $\eta_p^2 = .19$ ). Specifically, negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.13$ ) were perceived to be more persuasive than positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 5.27$ ). Moreover, individuals' perception of review volume and product type produced no salient effects ( $F = .94$ ,  $p = .33$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$  and  $F = .36$ ,  $p = .70$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ , correspondingly). Hypothesis Two was not supported as the interaction between Review

Valence, Review Volume and Product Type had no significant effect on perceived persuasiveness ( $F = .62, p = .54, \eta_p^2 = .00$ ).

#### 4.4.3 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on eWOM Effect

To test Hypothesis Three, a factorial ANCOVA was undertaken using the same three fixed factors and four covariates incorporated into the previous two analyses. The output of this analysis is provided in Table 4.14 and Table 4.15.

			eWOM Effect	
<i>Product Type</i>	<i>Review Valence</i>	<i>Review Volume</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	5.79	1.06
		Low	5.85	.74
	Negative	High	6.12	.64
		Low	5.91	1.06
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.55	1.06
		Low	5.89	1.05
	Negative	High	6.16	.70
		Low	5.71	1.09
High-Luxury	Positive	High	5.90	.78
		Low	5.17	1.55
	Negative	High	6.08	.77
		Low	6.24	.78
<i>Total</i>			5.86	1.00

**Table 4.14: eWOM Effect across Experimental Conditions**

eWOM Effect			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Product Involvement	17.86	.00	.04
Materialism	.83	.36	.00
Social Learning	3.34	.07	.01
Social Belonging	.17	.68	.00
Product Type	.30	.74	.00
Review Valence	22.12	.00	.05
Review Volume	1.75	.19	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	1.86	.16	.01
Product Type*Review Volume	.55	.58	.00
Review Valence*Review Volume	.17	.68	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	5.79	.00	.03

**Table 4.15: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on eWOM Effect**

The results of the analysis indicated that the Product Involvement covariate had a significant adjustment on the eWOM Effect ( $F = 17.86, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ), while the three residual covariates were found to have non-significant effects. There was a significant main effect for Review Valence ( $F = 22.12, p = .00$ ), although this effect was relatively small ( $\eta_p^2 = .05$ ). The finding was interpreted as negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.04$ ) having a significantly greater eWOM Effect than positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 5.69$ ). Notably, the main effects of Review Volume and Product Type were not significant for eWOM Effect ( $F = 1.75, p = .19, \eta_p^2 = .00$  and  $F = .30, p = .74, \eta_p^2 = .00$ , respectively). Although, the three-way interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type was found to have a significant interaction effect on the eWOM Effect ( $F = 5.79, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ), providing support for Hypothesis Three.

#### 4.4.4 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Reviews

As proposed in Chapter Three, Hypothesis Four suggests Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type would affect an individual's Attitude towards the Reviews. The results of the analysis, carried out to test for effects on Attitude towards the Reviews, are presented in Table 4.16 and Table 4.17.

			Attitude towards the Reviews	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	5.76	1.70
		Low	5.92	.90
	Negative	High	6.53	.62
		Low	6.47	.72
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.68	1.02
		Low	5.61	1.47
	Negative	High	6.58	.63
		Low	6.29	.71
High-Luxury	Positive	High	6.07	1.13
		Low	5.26	1.62
	Negative	High	6.47	.57
		Low	6.54	.68
Total			6.10	1.13

**Table 4.16: Attitude towards the Reviews across Experimental Conditions**

Variable	Attitude towards the Reviews		
	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
Product Involvement	43.89	.00	.10
Materialism	1.67	.20	.00
Social Learning	5.00	.03	.01
Social Belonging	.11	.74	.00
Product Type	.57	.57	.00
Review Valence	86.82	.00	.17
Review Volume	2.00	.16	.01
Product Type*Review Valence	.04	.96	.00
Product Type*Review Volume	1.70	.18	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	.41	.52	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	2.03	.13	.01

**Table 4.17: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Attitude towards the Reviews**

The ANCOVA results showed that an individual's Attitude towards the Reviews was not sensitive to the interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type ( $F = 2.03$ ,  $p = .13$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ), and therefore, Hypothesis Four was not supported. Although, Review Valence was found to have a significant main effect ( $F = 86.82$ ,  $p = .00$ ) that was moderate in size ( $\eta_p^2 = .17$ ). More specifically, negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.48$ ) evoked a significantly higher attitude towards reviews than positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 5.72$ ), yet both elicit a positive attitude in general. Such main effects were not present for Review Volume ( $F = 2.00$ ,  $p = .16$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ) and Product Type ( $F = .57$ ,  $p = .57$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ ). Furthermore, the Product Involvement and Social Learning covariates were found to have a significant adjustment for the dependent variable ( $F = 43.89$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$  and  $F = 5.00$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ , respectively), while Materialism and Social Belonging were not significant ( $p > .05$ ).

#### 4.4.5 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Information Adoption

A factorial ANCOVA was used to test Hypothesis Five, which proposed that Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type would interact in a manner that affects the proclivity for Information Adoption. Product Involvement, Materialism, Social Learning and Social Belonging continue to be used as covariate factors. The results are presented in Table 4.18 and Table 4.19.

			Information Adoption	
<i>Product Type</i>	<i>Review Valence</i>	<i>Review Volume</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	6.07	.85
		Low	6.17	.67
	Negative	High	6.08	.63
		Low	6.17	.66
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.84	.85
		Low	6.20	.58
	Negative	High	5.99	.79
		Low	6.27	.55
High-Luxury	Positive	High	6.15	.87
		Low	5.80	.91
	Negative	High	5.95	.88
		Low	6.34	.68
<i>Total</i>			6.09	.76

**Table 4.18: Information Adoption across Experimental Conditions**

Information Adoption			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Product Involvement	18.01	.00	.04
Materialism	8.56	.00	.02
Social Learning	1.08	.30	.00
Social Belonging	.09	.76	.00
Product Type	.12	.89	.00
Review Valence	5.20	.02	.01
Review Volume	4.66	.03	.01
Product Type*Review Valence	.17	.85	.00
Product Type*Review Volume	.89	.41	.00
Review Valence*Review Volume	2.08	.15	.01
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	2.04	.13	.01

**Table 4.19: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Information Adoption**

With regards to Information Adoption, the results indicated that the Product Involvement and Materialism covariates had a small but significant adjustment ( $F = 18.01$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$  and  $F = 8.56$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , respectively). Similar to the results of the preceding dependent variables, a significant main effect was present for Review Valence ( $F = 5.20$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ). Interestingly, an additional significant main effect was detected for Review Volume ( $F = 4.66$ ,  $p = .03$ ), but the effect was relatively small ( $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ). To interpret these main effects, a closer examination of mean Information Adoption across the Review Valence and Review Volume manipulations was performed. Such analyses revealed that negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.13$ ) were shown to have a small but significantly higher information adoption rate than positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.04$ ). Additionally, in relation to Review



Volume, a low number of reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.16$ ) had a significantly greater likelihood of being adopted into individual decision-making, compared to a high number of reviews ( $\bar{x} = 6.01$ ). There were no other main or interaction effects, and since the interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type had no significant effect on Information Adoption ( $F = 2.04$ ,  $p = .13$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ), Hypothesis Five was not supported.

#### 4.4.6 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Product

To test Hypothesis Six, the effects of the three independent variable manipulations were tested on Attitude towards the Product. The four covariates were considered in the analysis. The subsequent results are presented in Table 4.20 and Table 4.21.

			Attitude towards the Product	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	5.96	1.57
		Low	6.06	.74
	Negative	High	1.41	.78
		Low	1.57	.89
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.91	1.23
		Low	5.95	.95
	Negative	High	1.39	.64
		Low	1.36	.45
High-Luxury	Positive	High	6.06	1.30
		Low	5.71	1.24
	Negative	High	1.48	.71
		Low	1.33	.97
Total			3.68	2.47

**Table 4.20: Attitude towards the Product across Experimental Conditions**

Variable	Attitude towards the Product		
	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
Product Involvement	36.22	.00	.08
Materialism	.12	.73	.00
Social Learning	.09	.77	.00
Social Belonging	8.19	.00	.02
Product Type	.18	.84	.00
Review Valence	2165.64	.00	.84
Review Volume	.01	.91	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	.17	.85	.00
Product Type*Review Volume	1.41	.25	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	.05	.83	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	.00	1.00	.00

**Table 4.21: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Attitude towards the Product**

The results of the ANCOVA analysis revealed that the Product Involvement covariate is recurrent, as consistent with preceding dependent variables, it also exhibited a moderate significant adjustment for Attitude towards the Product ( $F = 36.22$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ ). The Social Belonging covariate was also found to have a small but significant adjustment for Attitude towards the Product ( $F = 8.19$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ), while the two remaining covariates were not statistically significant. In regards to main effects, Review Valence was found to elicit a significant effect ( $F = 2165.64$ ,  $p = .00$ ) that was substantially large ( $\eta_p^2 = .84$ ). Upon further examination, a positive relationship exists between Review Valence and the resultant Attitude towards the Product. Individuals exposed to positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 5.94$ ) exhibited a more positively-framed attitude towards the product, whereas negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 1.42$ ) evoked a negatively-framed product attitude. Furthermore, a non-significant interaction effect between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type was present for product attitudes, and accordingly, Hypothesis Six was not supported.

#### 4.4.7 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Brand

In order to test Hypothesis Seven, that proposed an influential effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the Attitude towards the Brand construct, the manipulation conditions are examined while controlling for confounding effects. Table 4.22 includes the mean and standard deviation for each experimental condition, where the latter Table 4.23 presents the results of the factorial ANCOVA analysis.

			Attitude towards the Brand	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	5.62	1.50
		Low	5.41	.97
	Negative	High	1.63	.93
		Low	1.77	1.05
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.84	1.18
		Low	6.01	.99
	Negative	High	3.39	1.99
		Low	3.05	1.86
High-Luxury	Positive	High	5.83	1.63
		Low	5.35	1.67
	Negative	High	3.74	2.06
		Low	3.01	1.92
Total			4.22	2.18

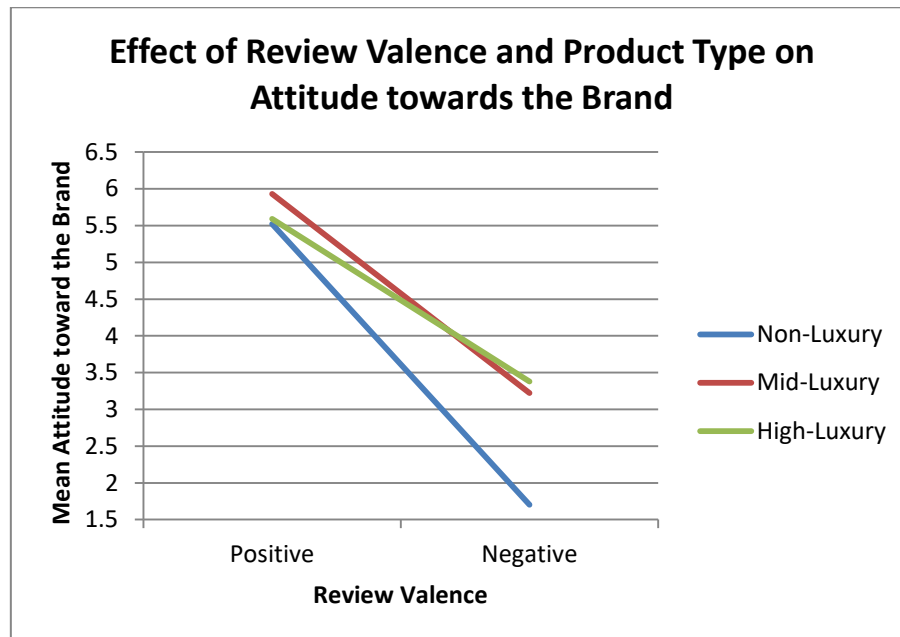
**Table 4.22: Attitude towards the Brand across Experimental Conditions**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Attitude towards the Brand</b>		
	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Product Involvement	19.63	.00	.05
Materialism	.02	.90	.00
Social Learning	.27	.60	.00
Social Belonging	14.55	.00	.03
Product Type	22.78	.00	.10
Review Valence	350.13	.00	.46
Review Volume	1.66	.20	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	9.09	.00	.04
Product Type*Review Volume	1.54	.22	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	.37	.54	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	.78	.46	.00

**Table 4.23: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Attitude towards the Brand**

With regards to brand attitude, the results indicated that a non-significant interaction effect exists between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type ( $F = .78$ ,  $p = .46$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ ), and therefore, this finding fails to support Hypothesis Seven. Similar to the results for Attitude towards the Product, the Product Involvement and Social Belonging covariates indicated a small significant adjustment for Attitude towards Brand ( $F = 19.63$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$  and  $F = 14.55$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ , respectively), while Material Vales and Social Learning were not significant. Moreover, there was a significant main effect for Review Valence ( $F = 350.13$ ,  $p = .00$ ), which was relatively large ( $\eta_p^2 = .46$ ). Product type also exhibited a moderate significant main effect on Attitude towards the Brand ( $F = 22.78$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ ). After descriptive analyses were performed, it became apparent that a

positive relationship exists between Review Valence and brand attitude. Intuitively, positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 5.68$ ) evoke a strong positive Attitude towards the Brand, while negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 2.77$ ) arouse a negative brand attitude. In relation to Product Type, individuals show a more positive attitude towards mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 4.57$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ) branded products than the non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.61$ ) counterpart. Furthermore, the results revealed a significant two-way interaction between Review Valence and Product Type ( $F = 9.09, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ), refer to Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1: Means Plot for Interaction Effect of Review Valence and Product Type on Attitude towards the Brand**

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the mean Attitude towards the Brand showed the largest discrepancy between negative ( $\bar{x} = 1.70$ ) and positive ( $\bar{x} = 5.52$ ) reviews for the non-luxury Product Type manipulation. Moreover, the non-luxury condition had a noticeably lower brand attitude score for negative reviews, compared to the mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.22$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.38$ ) conditions that exhibited similar results. In relation to positive reviews, the mid-luxury product had the highest score for brand attitude ( $\bar{x} = 5.93$ ), while non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.52$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.59$ ) were alike.

#### 4.4.8 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Conspicuous Consumption

Hypothesis Eight proposed an interaction effect between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the perceived Conspicuous Consumption value associated with product usage. To test this hypothesis, a factorial ANCOVA was undertaken incorporating the four covariates used in previous analyses. The output of this analysis is presented in Table 4.24 and Table 4.25.

			Conspicuous Consumption	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	3.59	1.62
		Low	2.78	1.40
	Negative	High	1.72	.89
		Low	1.84	.92
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	3.69	1.68
		Low	4.28	1.58
	Negative	High	3.27	1.79
		Low	3.32	1.51
High-Luxury	Positive	High	4.02	1.42
		Low	3.65	1.72
	Negative	High	3.91	1.30
		Low	3.07	1.86
Total			3.26	1.67

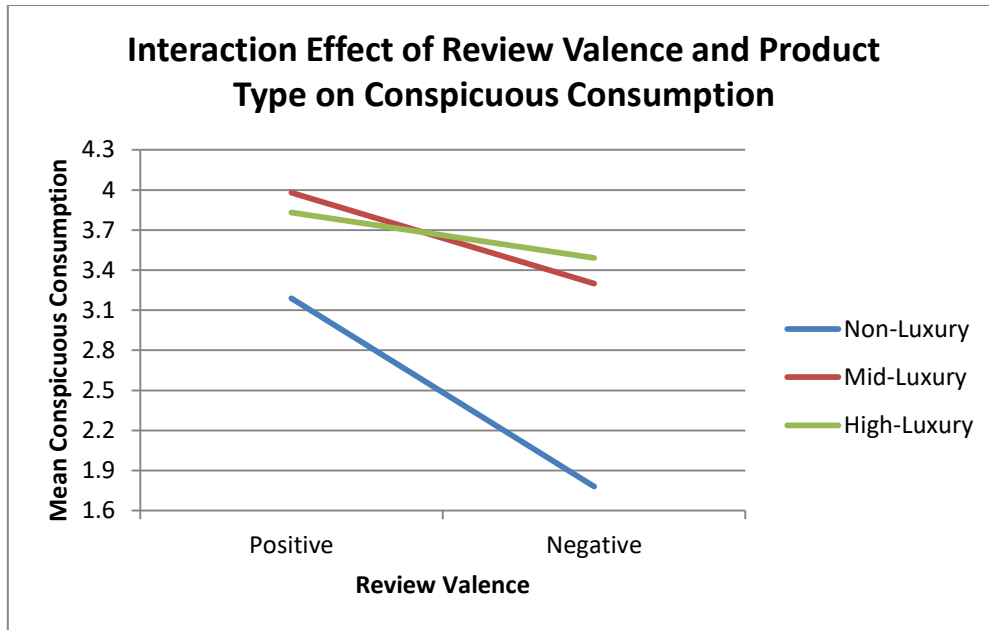
**Table 4.24: Conspicuous Consumption across Experimental Conditions**

Conspicuous Consumption			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Product Involvement	16.87	.00	.04
Materialism	3.36	.07	.01
Social Learning	.02	.88	.00
Social Belonging	77.88	.00	.16
Product Type	49.66	.00	.19
Review Valence	20.46	.00	.05
Review Volume	1.36	.24	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	3.76	.02	.02
Product Type*Review Volume	2.89	.06	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	.06	.81	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	4.31	.01	.02

**Table 4.25: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Conspicuous Consumption**

Consistent with results for the latter two dependent variables, this ANCOVA analysis found that the Product Involvement and Social Belonging covariates had a significant adjustment on Conspicuous Consumption ( $F = 16.87, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .04$  and  $F = 77.88, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .16$ , respectively). Notably, the adjustment of Social Belonging for the level of Conspicuous Consumption value was relatively large ( $\eta_p^2 = .16$ ). Furthermore, there was a strong significant main effect for Product Type ( $F = 49.66, p = .00$ ) that was moderate in size ( $\eta_p^2 = .19$ ). Review Valence was also found to have a small significant effect on Conspicuous Consumption ( $F = 20.46, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .05$ ). To examine these main effects, the mean Conspicuous Consumption scores were analysed across the manipulated Product Type and Review Volume conditions. The results showed that individuals perceive a greater

Conspicuous Consumption value with mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.64$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.66$ ) products, compared to non-luxury products ( $\bar{x} = 2.48$ ). In regards to Review Valence, positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 3.67$ ) were found to have a significantly higher Conspicuous Consumption value than negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 2.86$ ). A two-way interaction between Review Valence and Product Type also had a significant effect ( $F = 3.76, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ), as presented in Figure 4.2. In addition, the three-way interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type had a significant impact on Conspicuous Consumption ( $F = 4.31, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .02$ ). Accordingly, Hypothesis Eight was supported.



**Figure 4.2: Means Plot for Interaction Effect of Review Valence and Product Type on Conspicuous Consumption**

As depicted in Figure 4.2, there was a positive interaction effect across all Product Type conditions. Specifically, each Product Type manipulation experienced an increase in perceived Conspicuous Consumption value when positive reviews were available, however, such value decreased upon exposure to negative reviews. Notably, this interaction effect was more pronounced for non-luxury products and less prominent for high-luxury products. Interestingly, high-luxury maintained the highest Conspicuous Consumption score in the occurrence of negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 3.49$ ), followed by mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.30$ ), while non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 1.78$ ) had a noticeably lower score. Under the positive review condition, mid-luxury had a greater level of associative Conspicuous Consumption value ( $\bar{x} = 3.98$ ), compared to the non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.19$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.83$ ) product types.

#### 4.4.9 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Status Consumption

To test Hypothesis Nine, a factorial ANCOVA was undertaken using the same fixed factors and covariates as the previous analyses. The results of this analysis, testing for effects on Status Consumption, are found in Table 4.26 and Table 4.27.

			Status Consumption	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	3.30	1.57
		Low	2.71	1.24
	Negative	High	1.67	.93
		Low	1.86	.86
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	5.10	.97
		Low	5.11	1.09
	Negative	High	4.42	1.48
		Low	4.60	1.53
High-Luxury	Positive	High	5.66	1.16
		Low	5.72	1.22
	Negative	High	5.09	1.16
		Low	4.91	1.63
Total			4.18	1.85

**Table 4.26: Status Consumption across Experimental Conditions**

Status Consumption			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Product Involvement	3.18	.08	.01
Materialism	1.26	.26	.00
Social Learning	.05	.82	.00
Social Belonging	18.32	.00	.04
Product Type	252.59	.00	.55
Review Valence	37.77	.00	.08
Review Volume	.06	.80	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	2.12	.12	.01
Product Type*Review Volume	.32	.73	.00
Review Valence*Review Volume	.88	.35	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	2.08	.13	.01

**Table 4.27: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Status Consumption**

With regards to Status Consumption, the results showed that there was a non-significant interaction effect between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type ( $F = 2.08$ ,  $p = .13$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ), which lead to Hypothesis Nine being rejected. The Social Learning covariate was found to have a small but significant adjustment for perceived Status Consumption value ( $F = 18.32$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 =$

.04), while the three residual covariates were not significant. Although similar to the results for Conspicuous Consumption, there was a significant main effect for Product Type ( $F = 252.59, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .55$ ) and Review Valence ( $F = 37.77, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .08$ ). The main effect of Product Type on the level of Status Consumption value was particularly large ( $\eta_p^2 = .55$ ). A closer examination of the descriptive statistics revealed that a non-luxury product ( $\bar{x} = 2.39$ ) is associated with a lower Status Consumption value than mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 4.81$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 5.34$ ) products, which are perceived to be more status-laden. For the Review Valence manipulation, a greater perception of Status Consumption value is assigned to products with positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 4.60$ ) compared to those with negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 3.76$ ).

#### 4.4.10 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Need for Uniqueness

As proposed in Chapter Three, Hypothesis Ten suggested that Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type interact to affect Need for Uniqueness. To examine the interaction effect, a factorial ANCOVA was performed with the three independent variables entered as fixed factors, and four covariates were included to control for potential effects. The descriptives and results of the analysis are displayed in Table 4.28 and Table 4.29.

			Need for Uniqueness	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	4.15	1.38
		Low	3.74	1.52
	Negative	High	1.49	.57
		Low	1.98	.95
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	3.46	1.54
		Low	3.78	1.69
	Negative	High	2.58	1.42
		Low	2.57	1.59
High-Luxury	Positive	High	3.70	1.66
		Low	3.19	1.61
	Negative	High	2.18	1.15
		Low	2.10	1.39
Total			2.91	1.62

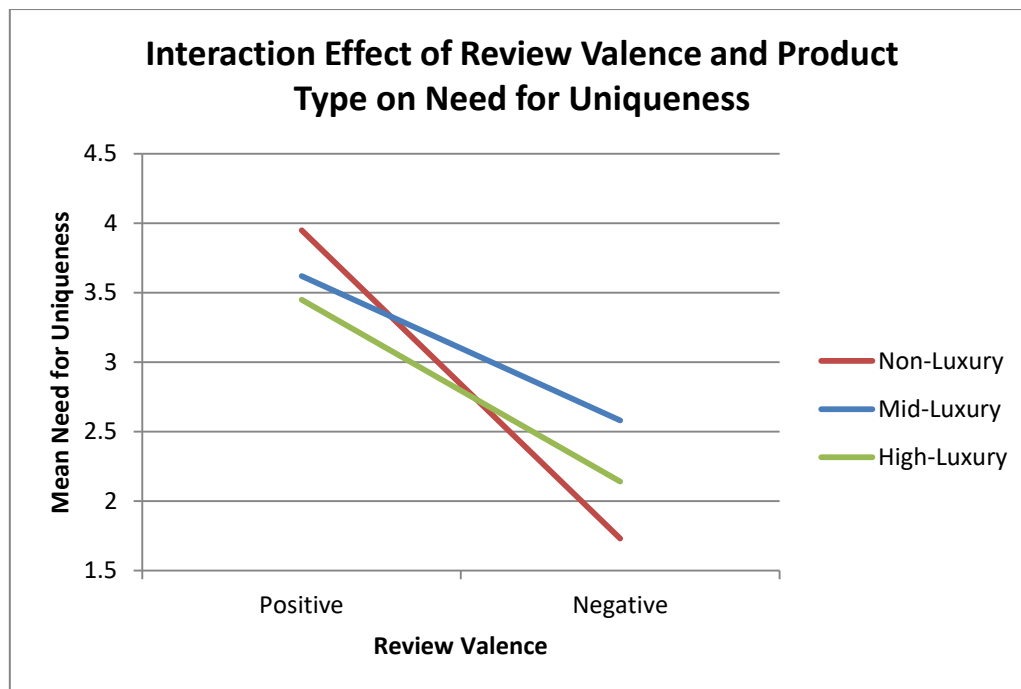
**Table 4.28: Need for Uniqueness across Experimental Conditions**



Variable	Need for Uniqueness		
	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
Product Involvement	38.20	.00	.08
Materialism	5.54	.02	.01
Social Learning	2.15	.14	.01
Social Belonging	102.85	.00	.20
Product Type	3.32	.04	.02
Review Valence	123.38	.00	.23
Review Volume	.19	.66	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	6.84	.00	.03
Product Type*Review Volume	.53	.59	.00
Review Valence*Review Volume	1.82	.18	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	1.71	.18	.01

**Table 4.29: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Need for Uniqueness**

The results of the ANCOVA procedure indicated that three covariates, excluding Social Learning, had significant effects. The Product Involvement and Materialism covariates were found to have small but significant adjustments for Need for Uniqueness ( $F = 38.20, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .08$  and  $F = 5.54, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .01$ , respectively), while the significant adjustment of the Social Belonging covariate was comparatively large ( $F = 102.85, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .20$ ). Furthermore, Product Type and Review Valence were found to have significant main effects on the perceived Need for Uniqueness value derived from product usage ( $F = 3.32, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .02$  and  $F = 123.38, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .23$ , correspondingly). To interpret these effects, the mean Need for Uniqueness score was examined across the Product Type and Review Valence manipulations. The findings indicated that the mid-luxury product ( $\bar{x} = 3.10$ ) had a significantly higher Need for Uniqueness value than the non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.80$ ) counterparts, which exhibited similar scores. However, these products, in general, are perceived as not satisfying a Need for Uniqueness motive, since the mean scores are below the neutral point (test value = 4). In terms of Review Valence, positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 3.67$ ) were found to communicate a greater Need for Uniqueness value than negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 2.15$ ). Additionally, an interaction effect between Product Type and Review Valence also elicited a significant effect on the perceived Need for Uniqueness value ( $F = 6.84, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ), as presented in Figure 4.3. Though, the dependent variable was not sensitive to the three-way interaction effect of Review Valence, Review Volume, and Product Type ( $F = 1.71, p = .18, \eta_p^2 = .01$ ), and therefore, Hypothesis Ten was not supported.



**Figure 4.3: Means Plot for Interaction Effect of Review Valence and Product Type on Need for Uniqueness**

Referring to Figure 4.3, it is apparent that the mean Need for Uniqueness score has the largest mean difference between positive ( $\bar{x} = 3.95$ ) and negative ( $\bar{x} = 1.73$ ) reviews for the non-luxury Product Type condition. Interestingly, the non-luxury condition scored the highest Need for Uniqueness score for positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 3.95$ ), followed by the mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.45$ ) product conditions. In relation to negative reviews, the non-luxury condition scored the lowest Need for Uniqueness mean ( $\bar{x} = 1.73$ ), compared to mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.58$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.14$ ) product types. However, the Review Valence and Product Type combinations are all below the neutral point (test point = 4) for the Need for Uniqueness construct, which implies a lack of perceived value manifesting in rarity, uniqueness and scarcity appeals.

#### 4.4.11 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Social Value

A factorial ANCOVA was performed to test Hypothesis Eleven, proposing that an interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type would affect the perceived Social Value associated with product consumption. Product Involvement, Materialism, Social Learning and Social Belonging continue to be used as covariate factors. The output of the analysis is presented in Table 4.30 and Table 4.31.

			Social Value	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	4.14	1.49
		Low	3.79	1.24
	Negative	High	1.65	.63
		Low	2.01	.97
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	4.01	1.59
		Low	4.44	1.52
	Negative	High	3.12	1.41
		Low	2.98	1.60
High-Luxury	Positive	High	4.23	1.93
		Low	3.72	1.58
	Negative	High	3.31	1.52
		Low	2.78	1.71
Total			3.35	1.68

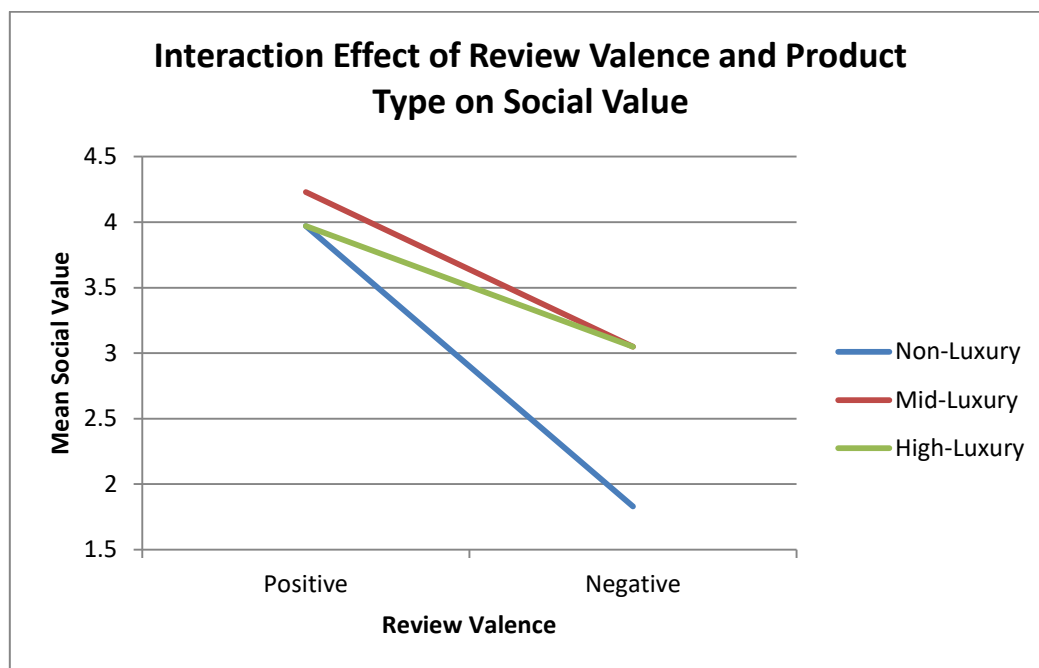
**Table 4.30: Social Value across Experimental Conditions**

Variable	Social Value		
	F	Sig.	$\eta_p^2$
Product Involvement	23.23	.00	.05
Materialism	13.41	.00	.03
Social Learning	.15	.70	.00
Social Belonging	71.08	.00	.15
Product Type	20.93	.00	.09
Review Valence	94.32	.00	.19
Review Volume	.33	.56	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	6.07	.00	.03
Product Type*Review Volume	1.41	.25	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	.00	.97	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	2.58	.08	.01

**Table 4.31: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Social Value**

From the factorial ANCOVA results it was revealed that three covariates, specifically, Product Involvement, Materialism and Social Learning, had significant adjustments for Social Value ( $F = 23.23$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ ;  $F = 13.41$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ; and  $F = 71.08$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .15$ , respectively). A significant main effect was present for Product Type ( $F = 20.93$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ ). Review Valence was also found to have a strong significant main effect ( $F = 94.32$ ,  $p = .00$ ) that was relatively large ( $\eta_p^2 = .19$ ). Upon examining the descriptive data, it was apparent that the non-luxury product ( $\bar{x} = 2.90$ ) was perceived as having a significantly lower Social Value than its mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.64$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ) counterparts. The mean Social Value scores for each Product Type manipulation, however, did fare poorly as positioned below the neutral point (test value = 4).

Accordingly, it is interpreted that these products are considered as performing weak on the fulfilment of social approval needs. In relation to Review Valence, positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ) intuitively communicated a greater Social Value for the product than negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 2.64$ ). Moreover, a two-way interaction between Product Type and Review Valence had a small but significant effect ( $F = 6.07, p = .00, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ) (refer to Figure 4.4). However, there were no other main effects for the dependent variable. The interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type exhibited no significant effect on Social Value ( $F = 2.58, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .01$ ), and subsequently, Hypothesis Eleven was not supported.



**Figure 4.4: Means Plot for Interaction Effect of Review Valence and Product Type on Social Value**

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, the largest interaction effect between negative ( $\bar{x} = 1.83$ ) and positive ( $\bar{x} = 3.97$ ) reviews for mean Social Value scores was under the non-luxury Product Type condition. The non-luxury condition had a significantly lower Social Value score ( $\bar{x} = 1.83$ ) under the negative Review Valence condition, compared to equal mean scores for mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ) product types. In relation to the positive Review Valence manipulation, the mid-luxury product exhibited a significantly higher mean Social Value score ( $\bar{x} = 4.23$ ) than non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.97$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.97$ ) products that reported identical mean scores.

#### 4.4.12 Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Purchase Intention

Hypothesis Twelve proposed an interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type would affect an individual's Purchase Intention. Four covariates were measured to restrict confounding effects. The results of this analysis are outlined in Table 4.32 and Table 4.33.

			Purchase Intention	
Product Type	Review Valence	Review Volume	Mean	Std Dev
Non-Luxury	Positive	High	4.75	1.99
		Low	4.44	1.69
	Negative	High	1.24	.54
		Low	1.41	.82
Mid-Luxury	Positive	High	4.18	1.93
		Low	4.13	1.89
	Negative	High	1.34	.74
		Low	1.31	.66
High-Luxury	Positive	High	3.81	2.12
		Low	3.04	1.93
	Negative	High	1.41	1.10
		Low	1.18	.45
Total			2.69	2.03

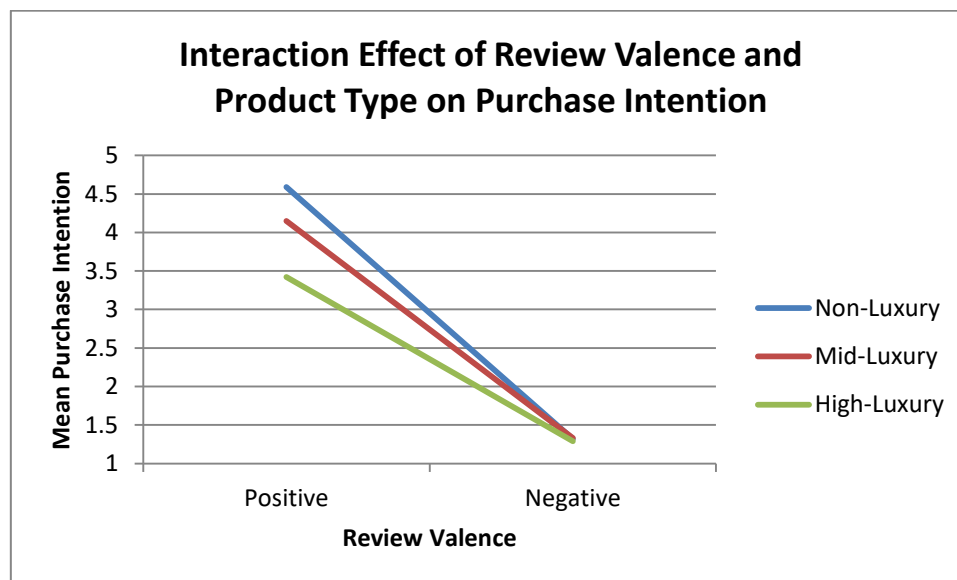
**Table 4.32: Purchase Intention across Experimental Conditions**

Purchase Intention			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b><math>\eta_p^2</math></b>
Product Involvement	24.80	.00	.06
Materialism	.11	.74	.00
Social Learning	.07	.79	.00
Social Belonging	22.29	.00	.05
Product Type	4.20	.02	.02
Review Valence	350.59	.00	.46
Review Volume	1.14	.29	.00
Product Type*Review Valence	4.73	.01	.02
Product Type*Review Volume	.96	.39	.01
Review Valence*Review Volume	1.42	.24	.00
Product Type*Review Valence*Review Volume	.09	.92	.00

**Table 4.33: Effects of Conditions and Covariates on Purchase Intention**

With regards to Purchase Intention, the ANCOVA results showed that a small significant adjustment was made for the Product Involvement and Social Belonging covariates ( $F = 24.80$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$  and  $F = 22.29$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ , respectively). There was a significant main effect for Product Type ( $F = 4.20$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ). Review Valence also exhibited a significant main effect ( $F =$

350.59,  $p = .00$ ), where the influence on the level of purchase intention was relatively large ( $\eta_p^2 = .46$ ). A closer examination of mean Purchase Intention scores across the experimental manipulations was performed, in order to interpret these main effects. The results revealed that the non-luxury product ( $\bar{x} = 2.96$ ) had a significantly higher Purchase Intention, followed by mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.74$ ), and then high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 2.36$ ) had the lowest score. Intuitively, positive reviews ( $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ) exhibited a greater Purchase Intention score than negative reviews ( $\bar{x} = 1.31$ ). Despite Purchase intention being positioned at the neutral point (target point = 4) for the positive Review Valence condition, it was reflective of the consumer mind-set having a weak purchase orientation. A two-way interaction between Product Type and Review Valence was also found to elicit a significant effect ( $F = 4.73$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ). However, the interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type had a non-significant effect on Purchase Intention ( $F = .09$ ,  $p = .92$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .00$ ), and accordingly, Hypotheses Twelve was not supported.



**Figure 4.5: Means Plot for Interaction Effect of Review Valence and Product Type on Purchase Intention**

As shown in Figure 4.5, there is a distinct interaction between across the Product Type manipulations for positive reviews. Individuals show a greater Purchase Intention towards the non-luxury product ( $\bar{x} = 4.59$ ) under the positive Review Valence condition, compared to mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 4.15$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ) products. Interestingly, all three Product Type manipulations, non-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 1.32$ ), mid-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 1.33$ ) and high-luxury ( $\bar{x} = 1.29$ ), had almost equivalent mean Purchase Intention scores for negative reviews. Hence, positive reviews have a differential effect on Purchase Intentions as a direct function of product type. The largest discrepancy in mean Purchase Intention between the two Review Valence conditions was for non-luxury (mean difference = 3.27).

## 4.5 HYPOTHESES RESULTS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The primary focus of this chapter was to examine the proposed hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three. A summary of the hypothesis test results are presented in Table 4.34. The results are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Supported</i>
H <sub>1</sub>	The Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Informative Value	✓
H <sub>2</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Persuasiveness	✗
H <sub>3</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on eWOM Effect	✓
H <sub>4</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Reviews	✗
H <sub>5</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Information Adoption	✗
H <sub>6</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Product	✗
H <sub>7</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Brand	✗
H <sub>8</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Conspicuous Consumption	✓
H <sub>9</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Status Consumption	✗
H <sub>10</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Need for Uniqueness	✗
H <sub>11</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Social Value	✗
H <sub>12</sub>	Interaction Effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Purchase Intention	✗

**Table 4.34: Hypotheses Testing Results**

The first hypothesis examined Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the Perceived Informative Value of the review set. The factorial ANCOVA revealed a significant interaction effect between the three independent variables on Perceived Informative Value. Review Valence also exhibited a significant main effect on the dependent variable. One covariate, Product Involvement, had a significant adjustment. Accordingly, *Hypothesis One was supported*.

Hypothesis Two, Three and Four focused on the interaction effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on a dependent variable (Perceived Persuasiveness, eWOM Effect and Attitude towards the Reviews, respectively). The ANCOVA analysis found a significant three-way

interaction was present for the eWOM effect; however, this variable interplay had a non-significant effect for Perceived Persuasiveness and Attitude towards the Reviews. A significant main effect of Review Valence was found for eWOM Effect, Perceived Persuasiveness and Attitude towards the Reviews. The Product Involvement covariate was salient for these three dependent variables. Hence, *Hypothesis Two and Four were rejected due to the absence of any significant interaction effect, while Hypothesis Three was supported.*

To test the effect of the three independent variables on Information Adoption, the fifth hypothesis studied the interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type. The Product Involvement and Materialism covariates made a significant adjustment, while two main effects were shown to be significant (Review Valence and Review Volume on Information Adoption); however, the analysis found that the combined effect of the three manipulations was not salient. Hence, *Hypothesis Five was not supported.*

Hypothesis Six and Seven examined the influence of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on consumer attitudes, specifically, Attitude towards the Product and Attitude towards the Brand. The ANCOVA analyses revealed no significant three-way interaction effects on these dependent variables. Although, there was a significant main effect elicited by Review Valence on both product and brand attitudes, while Review Volume had a significant effect exclusive to Attitude towards the Brand. Furthermore, the Product Involvement and Social Belonging covariates were significant, where the confounding effects were controlled. A two-way interaction between Review Valence and Product Type was present for Attitude towards the Brand. However, *Hypothesis Six and Seven were not supported.*

In relation to Hypothesis Eight and Nine, the interaction effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type was tested for Conspicuous Consumption and Status Consumption, respectively. The analysis indicated that a significant three-way interaction that was exclusive to Conspicuous Consumption. In addition, this dependent variable was also affected by a two-way interaction between Review Valence and Product Type. No such interaction effects were present for Status Consumption. However, both dependent variables reported significant main effects for Review Valence and Product Type. The Social Belonging covariate was adjusted for both ANCOVA analyses, while Product Involvement was an additional significant covariate for Conspicuous Consumption. Overall, *Hypothesis Eight was supported, whereas Hypothesis Nine was rejected.*

Hypothesis Ten and Eleven tested the interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type for an effect on Need for Uniqueness and Social Value, correspondingly. Although a



three-way interaction was not present, there was a significant two-way interaction between Review Valence and Product Type that produced an effect on both dependent variables. Review Valence and Product Type were also found to have significant main effects on Need for Uniqueness and Social Value. Further, Product Involvement, Materialism and Social Belonging covariates showed a significant adjustment for Social Value; the same applied for Need for Uniqueness, apart from the exception of Materialism being non-significant. Accordingly, *Hypothesis Ten and Eleven were not supported.*

Finally, in order to determine the effects on Purchase Intention, Hypothesis Twelve examined the interplay between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type. There were two main effects of Review Valence and Review Volume present; these variables were also subject to significant two-way interaction effects. However, the analysis found a non-significant interaction between the three manipulations on Purchase Intentions, and subsequently, *Hypothesis Twelve was not supported.*

Chapter Five discussed these findings in further detail.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the thesis, including a discussion of the major findings from the experiment in relation to extant literature. Practical and theoretical implications derived from the results are explored. Finally, the limitations of the current study are acknowledged and avenues for future research are suggested.

### 5.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 5.1.1 Summary of Research Purpose

User-generated online reviews are regarded as a persuasive source of information that is easily accessed and readily available for consumers, fostering an influential role in consumer decision-making (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The ubiquitous dissemination of such electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) moderates the market success of products (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan et al., 2008a). For that reason, it is important to understand the level of consideration given to product sentiments, when consumers seek to make a purchase decision.

Based on consumption goals, individuals apply a different set of judgement criteria to determine product quality (e.g., Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Intuitively, it is the perceived informational benefits of reduced product uncertainty and the accurate product quality evaluations that are key contributors to the value of information (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996; Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991). As such, product characteristics have been found to affect the perceived credibility and usefulness of the review set, which in turn mediates the degree of influence these online reviews exert on purchase behaviour (Cui et al., 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Extant research examining the moderating role of product type on online review effects has largely focused on search versus experience goods (Cui et al., 2012; Hao et al., 2010; Weathers et al., 2007) and utilitarian versus hedonic products (Pan & Zhang, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Notably, there is limited knowledge regarding the dynamics of online reviews affecting luxury consumption. This research isolated that contextual antecedents of purchase behaviour based on Review Volume and Review Valence for non-luxury, mid-luxury and high-luxury products.

In terms of academic contributions, the proposed study further discloses the effectiveness of online reviews on inducing purchase intentions while explicating the moderating role of product-luxury perceptions. Specifically, the results derived from this research will determine the eWOM metric (Review Valence/ Volume) that plays a more significant role in shaping purchase behaviour for non-luxury and luxury products. Accordingly, marketers will gain an insight into the optimal combination of review dimensions (Review Valence/ Volume) that can be leveraged across the

product-luxury continuum to evoke a favourable product evaluation and enhance purchase intentions. Several theories from information processing literature have been synthesised to assist with understanding the responses of individuals to online review stimuli. To determine the review dimensions that consumers trust enough to provide accurate and credible information and those that they will dismiss (Cheung et al., 2008; Filieri, 2015). Within the parameters of the current study, it was investigated as to whether online reviews have a differential effect on purchase intentions across the varying degrees of product-luxury perceptions. Hence, the findings will contribute to present knowledge and close the existing research gaps indicated by You et al. (2015).

To test the dependence relationships as hypothesised in Chapter Three, an online between-subjects experiment was conducted. Product Involvement, Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (comprised of Social Belonging and Social Learning factors) and Materialism were included as four covariates to control for any potential confounding effects. The findings are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

### **5.1.2 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Informative Value**

Hypothesis One in this research explored the effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the Perceived Informative Value of review set. It was anticipated that the manipulated levels of product-luxury perceptions would affect the salience of Review Valence and Review Volume metrics in information processing on the basis of the Perceived Informative Value. This prediction was based on several studies that suggest the perceived diagnosticity of reviews was exacerbated by subjective and idiosyncratic product attributes (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013), and accordingly, individuals directed their attention to heuristic cues such as drawing inferences on product popularity as signalled by review volume (Zeithaml, 1988). Such information processing patterns have been observed for experience goods (vs. search) (Cui et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2014a). Symbolic interactionism constitutes an intangible attribute that proves difficult to evaluate for luxury products as it epitomises judgement subjectivity (Dubois et al., 2001; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), and therefore, unlike search products, individuals were expected to devote attention to heuristic cues. Given the function-driven consumption goals of non-luxury products (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014), it was inferred that review valence will be more informative for such products. Such intuition is drawn from Sen and Lerman (2007), who found that a negativity bias was present for utilitarian products as negative information related to the tangible attributes poses a direct risk to functional utility; such information is weighted heavily during product evaluation to evade prospective losses (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

The results of the ANCOVA analysis revealed that the three independent variables did interact with one another to produce a significant effect on Perceived Informative Value. This finding confirms with the hypothesised interrelationships mentioned above and aligns with extant literature (Cui et al., 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Although no main effect of Review Volume or Product Type was found to affect the Perceived Informative Value of reviews. This result affirms the interdependency of the interaction effect, while reaffirming the findings of previous studies that have shown Review Volume to elicit a significant effect when acting through mediating variables, for example, product type (Cui et al., 2012), product involvement (Park & Lee, 2008) and consumer expertise (Park & Kim, 2008a). Hence, the result indicates that neither of these two independent variables (Review Volume and Product Type) is solely responsible for affecting appraisals of informative value.

A significant main effect of Review Valence on Perceived Informative Value was revealed in the results. Specifically, the result indicated that negative reviews are perceived to be more informative than positive reviews. Previous findings reflect this finding, as empirical evidence suggests that individuals attribute product experience (vs. reviewer bias) to negative reviews rather than positive reviews, where this distinction ascertains a greater informative value (Chen & Lurie, 2013; Sen & Lerman, 2007). In the same vein, the scarce and novel nature of negative information makes it more diagnostic when appraising product quality (Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Fiske, 1980).

Product Involvement elicited a confounding effect on this result, and therefore, it should be taken into consideration that Product Involvement can affect the approach consumers take to process information, and ultimately, influence their judgment of informative value (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1983).

### **5.1.3 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Perceived Persuasiveness**

Hypothesis Two explored the interaction of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the Perceived Persuasiveness of online reviews. The results revealed no interaction effects between the three independent variables and review persuasiveness. These findings seem to contradict the results in the extant literature. It was predicted that the persuasiveness of positive and negative reviews would exhibit a discrepancy across product-luxury perceptions. This was based on the premise that individuals devote more attention to non-luxury product reviews, which has positive implications for perceived persuasiveness, where a prevalent negativity bias exists due to the potential threat to functional utility discourages purchase behaviour (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). However, Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) found that such attention-related differences in

review valence are not present for luxury product reviews. Several studies provide additional weight to this notion, indicating that salient persuasive effects of review valence exist for search (vs. experimental) and utilitarian (vs. hedonic) products, since the tangible attributes are measured with objectivity and impose a direct implication on its ability to perform a functional task (Cui et al., 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007). While information regarding intangible attributes that are more susceptible to individual-level differences are perceived to be less credible, and therefore, elicit a marginal influence on consumer behaviour (Lee & Koo, 2012; Pan & Zhang, 2011; Zhang & Watts, 2008). Although, despite extant research, the interaction effect of Review Valence and Product Type on Perceived Persuasiveness was not supported in this research. This result indicates that Review Valence affects Perceived Persuasiveness, regardless of the subjectivity or objectivity of evaluative criteria (i.e., Product Type).

There was, however, a main effect of Review Valence present. Specifically, the result indicated that negative reviews have a higher Perceived Persuasiveness value than positive reviews. This finding implies that, regardless of Product Type, a negativity bias dominates consumer decision-making. Such a result is consistent with the loss aversion principle of prospect theory, where potential losses are weighted more heavily during product evaluation than gains (Lee et al., 2008a; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). Moreover, Review Volume and Product Type produced no salient effects. This finding reflects the notion that consumers devote limited attention to Review Volume, but rather, instead, are directed by the Review Valence in information processing. Moreover, a significant adjustment was made on Perceived Persuasiveness to control effects of the Product Involvement covariate.

#### **5.1.4 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on eWOM Effect**

Hypothesis Three investigates the idea that the variation of perceived product-luxury in conjunction with Review Valence and Review Volume would interact to elicit an influence on eWOM Effect. The results of the ANCOVA analysis showed that the three-way interaction between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type had a significant impact on the eWOM Effect. This finding aligns with extant literature, which has validated Product Type as a moderator of information direction-eWOM effect interaction (Park & Lee, 2009; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Alike utilitarian products, the objective and function-driven evaluative criteria of non-luxury products appears to have led individuals to accord more weight to Review Valence (Sen & Lerman, 2007). A similar augmented effect of Review Valence was expected for luxury products, as exhibited in the case of experimental products (Park & Lee, 2009), where a eWOM negativity effect materialises as negative information further exacerbates extant product uncertainty linked to a limited knowledge base on the intangible luxury attributes. Moreover, Lee et al. (2008a) contends that the number of online

reviews can have a valence-accentuating effect. An augmentation effect of review consensus arises from conformity pressures imposed by a larger reference group (Campbell & Fairey, 1989). Although extant research can help explicate the interaction effect, it is difficult to apprehend the manner in which each of the three independent variables interact to impact the overall influence of online reviews, however, it is understood that neither Review Volume nor Product Type elicited a main effect. These results imply that consumers are not sensitive to a low or high Review Volume, until it is considered in relation to Review Valence and Product Type. Indeed, there is a mechanism of influence on decision-making processes.

A main effect of Review Valence on eWOM Effect was present. This effect showed that negative reviews evoked a greater eWOM Effect than positive reviews, Park and Lee (2009) reported an equivalent finding. Moreover, the Product Involvement covariate had a significant adjustment on the eWOM Effect.

#### **5.1.5 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Reviews**

Hypothesis Four examined the effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Reviews. However, the results indicated no interaction effects of the three variable manipulations on Attitude towards the Reviews. No main effects of Review Volume and Product Type were reported either. These results are inconsistent with existing literature. A main effect of Product Type was expected, since previous findings indicated that product characteristics influenced the review credibility perceptions (i.e., the veracity and evaluative accuracy), which in turn shaped their Attitude towards the Reviews (Lee & Koo, 2012; Pan & Zhang, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007). A conflicting result was found in this research, which indicated that individuals sustain a neutral attitude when considering reviews across Product Type manipulations. Hence, this finding suggests that Product Type does not affect the perceived credibility and evaluative accuracy of online reviews, despite the idiosyncratic nature of the symbolic attributes of luxury products.

However, Review Valence was found to exhibit a main effect on the dependent variable. Participants were shown to have a more positive attitude towards negative reviews than positive ones. This finding indicates that consumers have a psychological tendency to accord greater weight to negative information based on their review veracity and credibility perceptions. This notion is supported in extant research, while the receiver is likely to deduce non-product related attributions to positive reviews, since social norms and peer pressure appear plausible reasons to motivate reviewers; however, the counter normative nature of negative reviews makes individuals feel confident to discount non-product related causes and attribute it to the product itself (Chen & Lurie,

2013; Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Mizerski, 1982). Reviewer self-serving biases diminish the perceived credibility of the sentiment, which in turn affects message persuasiveness and subsequent opinion change (Eagly et al., 1978; Zhang & Watts, 2008).

Consistent with latter dependent variables, Product Involvement had a covariate effect on this result. A significant adjustment on the Attitude towards the Reviews was also made for Social Learning covariate. This finding indicates that Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence can incite some individuals to accord greater weight to compliance with social norms, and shape their subsequent Attitude towards the Reviews (Bearden et al., 1989).

#### **5.1.6 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Information Adoption**

Based on previous electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) literature, Information Adoption was selected as a dependent measure that is a pivotal antecedent to the resultant purchase decision (Lee & Koo, 2012; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Hypothesis Five in this study proposed that Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type would interact to affect Information Adoption. However, no interaction effects were found elicit a significant impact on Information Adoption. Although the literature suggests that Product Type mediates the propensity to adopt positively- and negatively-framed reviews into decision-making, such effects were evident for utilitarian and hedonic products (Adaval, 2001; Sen & Lerman, 2007), that was not the case in this study.

A main effect of Review Valence on Information Adoption was found. Specifically, negative reviews had a higher Information Adoption rate than positive reviews. This finding aligned with several studies based in an online context, which provide empirical evidence to support the occurrence of negativity bias which materialises due to the perceived novelty and counter normative nature of negative reviews (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Cui et al., 2012). By virtue of its rarity, negative reviews are considered to be more instrumental in classifying products as poor-quality than positive reviews are for determining a high-quality classification (Fiske, 1980; Herr et al., 1991; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). As mentioned above, negative reviews are also attributed to the product experience which enhances the informative value (Chen & Lurie, 2013). As such, this diagnostic value of negative reviews is a key determinant that led to a greater propensity among participants to adopt negative information into their decision-making process (Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Wang & Wei, 2006).

Additionally, a main effect of Review Volume on Information Adoption was present, where a low number of reviews had a greater likelihood of being adopted into decision-making than a high

number of reviews. Pan and Zhang (2011) explained that a smaller number of reviews enhanced the relative importance of each available review as it was more likely to provide new information, which seems evident in this research. Moreover, consumers become overwhelmed from having 'too much' information available to process, as it causes cognitive strain and reduces the perceived informativeness of the review set, triggering information overload to materialise (Jacoby et al., 1974b; Malhotra, 1984; Park & Lee, 2008).

Similar to the results of the preceding dependent variables, the Product Involvement covariate had a significant adjustment on Information Adoption as expected (Park & Lee, 2008). Materialism also elicited a covariate effect on this result, and therefore, it should be taken into consideration that materialistic traits can influence the Information Adoption process as it is likely that greater weight is accorded to self-concept enhancement appeals (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

#### **5.1.7 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Product**

Hypothesis Six explored the effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Product. The results of the ANCOVA analysis indicated that no interaction effects were present between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on product attitudes. Although previous studies have found empirical support to suggest Review Volume has a valence-accentuating effect, as it exerts a heightened pressure of group opinion that led individuals to deduce a similar product attitude in conformity with others (Khare et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2008a), such an interaction effect was not present in this research.

There was, however, a main effect present, a positive relationship between Review Valence and the resultant Attitude towards the Product. As expected, individuals exposed to positive reviews exhibit a more positively-framed Attitude towards the Product, whereas negative reviews evoke a negatively-framed product attitude. This result supports previous research which has indicated that online reviews are influential in attitude formation (Herr et al., 1991; Huang et al., 2012). No main effect of Review Volume or Product Type was found.

The Product Involvement covariate is recurrent, as it also exhibited a significant adjustment for Attitude towards the Product. In addition, the Social Belonging covariate also resulted in a significant adjustment to the result. This confounding effect is expected, since there is individual differences in the susceptibility to conformity pressures to follow the prevailing group norm in attitude formation (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975).



### 5.1.8 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Attitude towards the Brand

Hypothesis Seven explored the interaction of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on consumer Attitude towards the Brand. The results returned no significant effect for the three-way interaction between the independent variables on brand attitude, although there was a main effect of Review Valence present. This effect indicated that positive reviews evoke a strong positive Attitude towards the Brand, while negative reviews arouse a negative brand attitude. This finding added weight to previous studies that found a positive relationship exists between Review Valence and brand attitude (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015; Lee et al., 2009). Such results are further reinforced by social comparison theory, which suggest that individuals have a propensity to conform to the majority opinion of the reference group when forming an attitude (Festinger, 1954).

Moreover, a main effect of Product Type on brand attitude was found. A closer examination of this effect revealed that brand attitudes were verging on the neutral point, although a minor positively-framed attitude is elicited towards mid-luxury and then high-luxury, while the non-luxury counterpart has a slight negatively-framed attitude. This result indicates an apparent preference for luxury products, since these products are functionally equivalent to non-luxury products, yet offer distinctive psychological benefits (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). The mid-luxury brand evokes a more positive attitude, which seems to indicate that individuals prefer popular, mass luxury products which aligns with the 'bandwagon effect' of luxury consumption (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

An interaction effect of Review Valence and Product Type was present. This result indicates that the manipulated levels of product-luxury perception mediate the influence of review valence on resultant product attitudes. The largest discrepancy between negative and positive reviews exists for non-luxury products. This result appears to be indicative of extant research that suggests tangible attributes are easily comprehended and measured with objectivity, and accordingly, alleviate risk associated with the purchase decision by presenting direct implications to product functionality (Pan & Zhang, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007). While negative reviews were less persuasive on attitudes towards luxury products. This result is consistent with affect-confirmation theory (Adaval, 2001), individuals anticipate a 'feel good' sentiment when exposed to luxury product reviews due to the psychological benefits, and consequently, are more inclined to positively evaluate the product (Kunda, 1990). As indicated above, individuals display a moderately positive attitude towards luxury products, which appears to have shaped a positive predisposition in the affect-based product evaluation which has offset the negativity effect (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009). Moreover, individuals are likely able to effectively discount or counter-argue negative dissonant information due to the

subjective, idiosyncratic nature of luxury attributes and, as such, minimise its influence in decision-making (Adaval, 2001; Ahluwalia, 2000).

Similar to the results for Attitude towards the Product, the Product Involvement and Social Belonging covariates were found to elicit a significant effect on the dependent measure.

#### **5.1.9 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Conspicuous Consumption**

Hypothesis Eight investigated the interaction effect between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the perceived Conspicuous Consumption value associated with product usage. The results indicated there was a significant effect in manner that Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type interact to influence Conspicuous Consumption value. The interaction effect appears to reflect the 'bandwagon effect' (Leibenstein, 1950), as consumers aspire to conform to the higher echelon or distinguish oneself from non-affluent lower social class via reinforcing a status distinction through Conspicuous Consumption (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; Midgley, 1983; Sirgy, 1982; Veblen, 1899). Such bandwagon effects materialise as a function of social origin (i.e., Review Volume signals a popular, must-have product) and social valence (i.e., such effects display the collective norm and reinforce the behaviour of others) (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

A main effect of Review Valence on Conspicuous Consumption value was present. Specifically, the results revealed that positive reviews communicate a higher Conspicuous Consumption value than negative reviews. This finding is reflective of conspicuous and status consumption literature (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; O'cass & Frost, 2002), which indicates that individuals aspire to engage in the ostentatious display of products to gain acceptance of or signal belongingness to a reference group. This suggests Review Valence functions as a social-referencing cue, which in turn is a strong predictor of the conspicuousness of the product. Individuals control their expressive behaviour based on social cues observed, which triggers situationally appropriate behaviour (Gould, 1993). Specifically, negative reviews lead to inferences of social disapproval, and as a result a lower Conspicuous Consumption value is attributed to the product.

Product Type also elicited a moderate main effect on the dependent measure. In general, a relatively low Conspicuous Consumption value was associated with the products. Although individuals perceived a greater Conspicuous Consumption value for mid-luxury products, followed by high-luxury, and then the lowest conspicuousness was associated with the non-luxury product. As expected, this result suggests that a popular, mass-consumed luxury product is more conspicuous

(O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). No main effect of Review Volume was present, since it acts through mediating variables as observed via luxury bandwagon consumption (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

A two-way interaction effect of Review Valence and Product Type was present. A closer examination indicated that non-luxury product had the strongest positive relationship with Review Valence, while a much weaker interaction effect occurred for luxury products. This result appears as though the prospect of leveraging a more potent status symbol in image portrayal offsets the negativity effect of Review Valence. This finding reinforces the extant notion that individuals exhibit a preference for acquiring status products that serve as an indicator of a prestigious position in the status stratum via Conspicuous Consumption (O'cass & Frost, 2002; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Product Involvement had a covariate effect on Conspicuous Consumption value. In addition, Social Belonging had a relatively large adjustment on this result, which was anticipated since susceptibility to reference group influence (normative) has a direct positive influence on status and conspicuous consumption tendencies (Marcoux et al., 1997; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

#### **5.1.10 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Status Consumption**

Hypothesis Nine examined the effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the perceived Status Consumption value associated with product acquisition and usage. The results indicated that no significant effect arose from the three-way interaction on the Status Consumption value; however, there was a main effect of Product Type present. As expected, the Status Consumption value associated with a product increased as a direct function of the relative strength of product-luxury appeals. Hence, the high-luxury condition scored the greatest status Consumption Value. As such, status value materialises as a function of the product's ability to confer and symbolise prestige due to its superior positioning in the product category (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Indeed, the high-luxury condition is positioned in the upper-tier of the luxury market, which reinforces elitist, exclusive and prestige connotations, which confers the utmost esteem to product users (O'cass & Frost, 2002).

It was expected that, since the perceived exclusivity signals prestige and reinforces the 'snob effects' of luxury consumption (Leibenstein, 1950; Zinkhan & Prenshaw, 1994), a low number of online reviews will be inferred as a few owning the product which in turn reinforces exclusivity connotations. This was not the case, however, as no main effect of Review Volume was found. A main effect of Review Valence was present, however, which indicated that a greater Status

Consumption value is assigned to products with positive reviews, compared to those with negative reviews.

A significant adjustment was made to this result to control confounding effects of the Social Learning covariate. Accordingly, it should be taken into consideration that Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence mediates the degree to which a product is perceived to be a status symbol.

#### **5.1.11 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Need for Uniqueness**

Hypothesis Ten explored the interaction effect between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the perceived Need for Uniqueness (NFU) value derived from product usage. The dependent variable was not sensitive to the three-way interaction effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type. However, a main effect of product type on NFU value was found. The results indicated that, in general, the product-luxury manipulations had relatively low NFU scores and are not effective solutions to satisfy a NFU motive. However, the mid-luxury product was associated with a higher NFU value than the non-luxury and high-luxury counterparts, which had reported similar scores. This finding seems to contradict the prevailing notion that the functional value of uniqueness, ascending from the perceived exclusivity of a product, will support an individual's need for uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Inferences were drawn from Tian et al. (2001), which suggest that a high NFU value is derived from an exclusive, upper-tier luxury product as individuals seek to dissociate themselves from the 'common herd'. The premium price point makes it unattainable to the majority of consumers, which reinforces its perceived exclusivity and fulfils an individual's desire to be different (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Consistent with Leibenstein (1950), Zhan and He (2012) found that the symbolic value associated with a luxury product diminishes (for those with a uniqueness-seeking goal) when there is widespread ownership of the product, as it becomes a mass symbol. A notion exists that a high NFU causes tension in relation to mass-consumed luxury products (Lynn, 1991). However, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) provide a possible explanation for the discrepancy between the results of this research and previous findings on the conventional manifestation of NFU – avoidance of similarity. Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) identified that a positive relationship exists between creative choice counter-conformity, one dimension of NFU, and the bandwagon effect in luxury consumption. The study indicated that individuals seek to achieve a balance between their NFU and the consumption of popular luxury products that will gain the approval of significant others (Tian et al., 2001). Indeed, the high NFU value attached to the mid-luxury product can also be explained by the preceding notion (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012).

A main effect of Review Valence was also present, which revealed that positive reviews were found to communicate a greater NFU value than negative reviews. This finding further adds weight to the deduction that individuals are according NFU value on the basis of creative choice counter-conformity (Tian et al., 2001). Moreover, an interaction effect of Review Valence and Product Type was found to be significant. The results revealed that non-luxury product had the strongest positive relationship between Review Valence and the resultant NFU value. The non-luxury product also scored the highest NFU value under the positive review condition and the lowest NFU score for negative reviews.

Product Involvement had a covariate effect on this result. A small but significant adjustment was made to control the confounding effects of the Materialism covariate. This effect was expected as individuals engage in self-distinguishing behaviours when their self-perceived uniqueness is threatened, where they strongly value material possessions as associated with minimal social risk relative to other means of self-expression (Snyder & DeBono, 1985; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013). Social Belonging covariate had a large adjustment made to this result.

#### **5.1.12 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Social Value**

Hypothesis Eleven investigated the effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on the perceived Social Value associated with product consumption. The results revealed no interaction effect between the three independent variables on Social Value. However, a main effect of Product Type on perceived Social Value was present. Specifically, the non-luxury product had a lower Social Value in comparison to its luxury counterparts, where mid-luxury condition had the highest perceived Social Value. The finding is reflective of the 'bandwagon effect' in luxury consumption, as popular luxury products enable consumers to conform to a reference group (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Leibenstein, 1950).

Additionally, a main effect of Review Valence was found, which revealed that positive reviews intuitively communicated a greater Social Value for the appraised product than negative reviews. This result demonstrates the social-adjustive function of luxury consumption. As individuals seek to evade the connotations that a negatively evaluated product may confer onto their social self-concept (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993).

An interaction effect of Review Valence and Product Type was also present. A closer examination of results indicates that the strongest positive relationship between Review Valence and the resultant Social Value was under the non-luxury condition. For the negative review

manipulation, non-luxury had a relatively low Social Value score compared to mid-luxury and high-luxury counterparts which had equivalent values. This result appears to show the higher product-luxury perception counteracts the negativity effect, which implies that luxury products are more socially desirable (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

Product Involvement had a covariate effect on the result. A significant adjustment was made on the result for Materialism covariate. Social Learning covariate also had a significant confounding effect on the result that was controlled.

#### **5.1.13 Effects of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Purchase Intention**

Hypothesis Twelve examined the influence of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Purchase Intention. The results of the ANCOVA analysis show that no interaction effect exists between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on Purchase Intention. A main effect of Product Type was present, however, which indicated that the non-luxury product had the highest Purchase Intention, followed by mid-luxury, while high-luxury had the lowest score. This finding indicates that individuals associate a greater risk and uncertainty with a purchase decision related to luxury products. A main effect of Review Valence on Purchase Intention was also found. Intuitively, positive reviews evoked a greater Purchase Intention than negative reviews. As expected, this finding is reflective of the loss aversion principle in prospect theory, where individuals seek to minimise risk and evade products with poor quality perceptions induced by negative reviews (Lee et al., 2008a; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

The interaction of Product Type and Review Valence had a significant effect on Purchase Intention. A closer examination of results indicates that the non-luxury condition has the strongest positive relationship between Review Valence and Purchase Intention. Under the positive review manipulation, the highest Purchase Intention was displayed for a non-luxury product and then mid-luxury, while individuals were least inclined to purchase the high-luxury product. Interestingly, all three Product Type manipulations had almost equivalent Purchase Intention scores for negative reviews. Indeed, positive reviews have a differential effect on Purchase Intentions across product-luxury perceptions. This finding is consistent with previous research, since product uncertainty is exacerbated by the subjective, intangible luxury attributes, and accordingly, luxury product reviews are more likely to be attributed to reviewer biases rather than objective product characteristics, which in turn makes these reviews less persuasive and salient in decision-making (Cheema & Papatla, 2010; Pan & Zhang, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014a). Hence, this finding appears to show luxury

product reviews exhibit a similar effect on purchase consideration as demonstrated for hedonic products (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

Product involvement and social belonging elicited a covariate effects on this result.

## 5.2 DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

The results of this research revealed a significant interaction effect of Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on three dependent variables, specifically, Perceived Informative Value, eWOM Effect and Conspicuous Consumption value. This exploratory research tested variable combinations that had previously not been studied, in particular, the mediating role of product-luxury perceptions on the influence of online reviews. On the basis of the theoretical notion that discontinuity exists in the perceived luxury attributed to brands (Kapferer, 1997), this research sought to incorporate a mid-luxury and high-luxury dimension. However, the manipulation check revealed that individuals were unable to perceive a noticeable difference in perceived luxury between the mid-luxury and high-luxury conditions; accordingly, caution was exercised when interpreting these results.

The results revealed that Product Type did have a significant effect on six dependent measures (i.e., Attitude towards the Brand, Conspicuous Consumption, Status Consumption, Need for Uniqueness, Social Value and Purchase Intention). In agreement with luxury consumption literature, the results reaffirm the notion that individuals purchase luxury products for psychological benefits that extend beyond functional utility (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). This was evident in the consumers' evaluation of luxury products in terms of their ability to deliver greater value in satisfying status and conspicuous consumption motives, compared to the non-luxury counterpart. Where such expressive motives arise from a behavioural propensity to acquire products to communicate latent information to significant others (Hudders, 2012; McCracken, 1986), the current study provides supportive evidence that individuals do associate symbolic interactionism with luxury products, as acquisition is linked to status symbolism where conspicuous usage enhances their social standing (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Moreover, the results indicated a higher social value was attributed to luxury products, which highlights the social utility derived from the latter value-expressive function (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Since a status-laden product coupled with ostentatious display can be leveraged for an extended inference of product usage, signalling belongingness to a reference group (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999).

In addition, the results indicated that Review Valence was consistently the most salient review dimension (vs. Review Volume), exhibiting a significant influence on all dependent measures. This

result indicates that participants assigned greater weight to Review Valence (vs. Review Volume) in their decision-making. A synthesis of electronic word-of-mouth literature revealed that supportive evidence exists for a negativity bias (e.g., Chen & Lurie, 2013; Cui et al., 2012; Yang & Mai, 2010) and a positivity effect (e.g., Clemons et al., 2006; Gershoff et al., 2003), although less recurrent. The current study revealed that a prominent negativity bias was salient during information processing, as participants considered negative reviews as more informative and persuasive than positive reviews (Perceived Informative Value; Perceived Persuasiveness). The diagnostic value of negative information materialised from its counter normative nature and consequent product-related attributions (Kanouse & Hanson, 1987; Mizerski, 1982), which led consumers to accord greater weight to negative reviews as explicated by cue diagnosticity theory (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Moreover, such results align with the loss aversion principle of prospect theory (Lee et al., 2008a; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). In relation to Attitude towards the Review, individuals were found to elicit a more positive attitude towards negative reviews than positive ones, which implies a favourable perception manifesting in usefulness, accuracy and informativeness dimensions. When individuals form impressions of a product, they use available information on the basis of diagnosticity judgements (Cheung et al., 2009; Schlosser, 2005; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). This notion in extant research was confirmed, as the perceived credibility and diagnosticity of negative information led to participants eliciting a higher information adoption intention towards negative reviews than positive reviews. Adding weight to the identified negativity effect, the results confirmed a stronger eWOM effect was evoked by negative reviews. As such, the finding was consistent with the prevailing consensus in extant research, which recognises that negative information, in general, exerts a stronger influence than positive information (Cui et al., 2012; Herr et al., 1991; Lee et al., 2009; Xue & Zhou, 2011).

The results of the study revealed that Review Valence has a positive relationship with the perceived luxury consumption value attributed to the product. Specifically, positive reviews led to participants making more favourable appraisals of luxury value linked to Status Consumption, Conspicuous Consumption, Need for Uniqueness and Social Value. This finding indicates that individuals follow the product sentiments of others on these product attributes. The intangible nature of such evaluative criteria exacerbates the subjectivity of product sentiments. Accordingly, consumers were expected to overlook Review Valence, as idiosyncratic reviews are less informative of product quality (Pan & Zhang, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007), and direct their attention to heuristic cues and use product popularity (as signalled by Review Volume) to make inferences about luxury criteria, as applicable in the case of experience goods (Cui et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2014a; Zhang et al., 2010b). This was not evident in the current study, instead, as mentioned above,



Review Valence was the more salient dimension in evaluations of luxury value. Since luxury value is based on an interpersonal dimension on expressive motives (i.e., a socially-directed behaviour), it appears that consumers seek to conform to majority opinion of the reference group as a function of social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Individuals seek to convey a symbolic meaning that gains approval in social situations by conforming to evaluative opinions of significant others, in order to evade an undesirable impression/ self-concept (Bearden et al., 1989). Accordingly, interpersonal influences have been found to mediate behaviour in luxury consumption (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Mason, 1981; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

Interestingly, Review Volume was found to have one significant influence in this research on Information Adoption. The results revealed that a low volume of reviews had a greater likelihood of being adopted into consumer decision-making, compared to a high volume of reviews. Such an effect confirms previous research findings regarding the onset of information overload linked to a reduction in the Perceived Informativeness of available reviews and the deterioration of decision quality (Jacoby et al., 1974b; Keller & Staelin, 1987; Park & Lee, 2008). Moreover, the lack of significant results involving Review Volume was not completely unexpected, as several studies confirmed its significance manifests through mediating variables (Cui et al., 2012; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008b; Park & Lee, 2008; Park et al., 2007), which is also recognised in this current study in the three-way interaction effects.

This research confirmed that product-luxury perceptions have a moderating role on the influence of Review Valence on five dependent measures (i.e., Attitude towards the Brand, Conspicuous Consumption, Need for Uniqueness, Social Value and Purchase Intentions). In relation to Attitude towards the Brand, the results revealed a slightly positively-framed attitude towards mid-luxury products and then high-luxury, while a slightly negatively-framed attitude was exhibited towards non-luxury product. When considering the interaction effect of Review Valence, it was found that negative reviews exacerbated the negative attitude expressed towards the non-luxury product, while the positive predisposition appeared to offset the negativity effect for luxury products. This finding reflects the affect-confirmation theory (Adaval, 2001), where expectation of pleasure predisposes individuals to engage in positive consistency bias, in which they minimise the influence of negative reviews when it can be easily refuted (Ahluwalia, 2000). Individuals are able to effectively counter-argue the negative luxury reviews due to the subjectivity of the symbolic value (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). However, such effects were not present for non-luxury products as functional considerations require a reasons-based evaluation (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009).

Moreover, the study revealed that the effect of Review Valence on Purchase Intentions was mediated by product-luxury perceptions (i.e., Product Type). Intuitively, consistent with previous studies, positive reviews induced a greater Purchase Intention than negative reviews (e.g., Floh et al., 2013; Xue & Zhou, 2011). In regards to Product Type manipulations, participants indicated a greater Purchase Intention for the non-luxury product, followed by the mid-luxury condition, while high-luxury with the lowest score. These findings are indicative of greater purchase uncertainty associated with luxury products. This result is consistent with previous studies which suggest that consumers are difficult to convince on ambiguous, intangible product attributes based on subjective judgements. Specifically, Sen and Lerman (2007) found that negative reviews for hedonic products were attributed to the reviewer biases (reflective of subjective judgement), and subsequently, considered to be less informative about product quality. Grounded in the findings from Pan and Zhang (2011), it is recognised that the tangible attributes of non-luxury products are easily understood and likely to be measured with objectivity, which in turn alleviates the perceived purchase risk. In the same vein, previous studies have found consumers exhibit a clear preference for objective information in their decision-making (Klein & Ford, 2003; Lee & Koo, 2012). Hence, persuasive effects materialise for non-luxury products, since Review Valence imposes a direct implication on the ability of product attributes to maximise functional utility. This notion has been empirically supported in the case of search products (vs. experimental products) (Cui et al., 2012; Hao et al., 2010). Lee and Koo (2012) found that individuals perceive online reviews with objective information as more credible than those with subjective information. Previous research highlights that information regarded as credible is likely to elicit a greater influence on consumer behaviour (Zhang & Watts, 2008). Based on this synthesis of previous research, this finding appears to show that individuals were more inclined to consider online reviews for non-luxury products (vs. luxury counterparts) in their purchase decision, which led to it being more influential on Purchase Intention.

## **5.3 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **5.3.1 Managerial Implications**

The managerial implications of this research are immediate, since the ability to develop brand relationships on online platforms epitomises the future of luxury consumption. Marketers must comprehend all of the potential influences associated with online reviews in order to effectively persuade consumers to purchase luxury products via an e-retailing site. These findings are particularly influential for luxury brands shifting onto online platforms to generate demand for their products.

This research sought to provide insight for luxury brands on the interaction of online reviews and Product Type (product-luxury perceptions), and the influence on purchase behaviour. The study was able to determine three interaction effects between Review Valence, Review Volume and Product Type on consumer responses. The verified relationship between the three independent variables on purchase behaviour reinforces the need for marketers to consider the impact of such metrics in planning eWOM tactics.

The results indicated that Review Valence, relative to Review Volume, plays a more prominent role in shaping purchase behaviour across varying product-luxury perceptions. A prominent negativity bias was revealed, when individuals process online product reviews. Marketers should be cognizant of the greater propensity of consumers to accept negative advice into their decision-making, which reveals the willingness and intention to be more reliant on negative information in their purchase decision (Gershoff et al., 2003). Hence, marketers need to proactively manage the dissemination of negative reviews to minimise the negative effect on Purchase Intention.

The study provided a useful insight into the mediating role of product-luxury perceptions on the influence of Review Valence on consumer behaviour. Specifically, this research revealed that the effects of Review Valence are augmented in impression formation for non-luxury products (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). As such, non-luxury products were more sensitive to negativity bias in attitude formation. The tangible attributes of non-luxury products are measured with objectivity, which in turn promotes credibility and diagnosticity perceptions of the online reviews, making them more influential on purchase behaviour (Lee & Koo, 2012; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Marketers need to consider the greater influence of positive and negative reviews on purchase decision-making for non-luxury products.

Marketers need to be aware of the positive predisposition held for luxury products, which offsets the negativity effect induced by negative reviews on attitude formation and the evaluation of luxury value dimensions. A lack of sensitivity to Review Valence for luxury products which, in general, was more prominent for high-luxury products, appears to materialise from the subjective judgement of the ambiguous evaluation criteria inherent to the intangible luxury attributes. Accordingly, consumers were able to counter-argue or discount negative dissonant information, engaging in consistency bias shaped by their slightly positively-framed attitude (Adaval, 2001; Ahluwalia, 2002). Moreover, positive product reviews were less effective in reducing product uncertainty and associated purchase risk on purchase intentions for luxury products.

In relation to purchase intentions, marketers should be mindful of positive reviews eliciting a greater Purchase Intention for non-luxury products, while being less effective on high-luxury products. Such a result indicates that product uncertainty is more inherent for high-luxury products, where consumers are less swayed by positive recommendations. Hence, marketers need to invest efforts in developing perceived credibility and informativeness of luxury product reviews to increase Purchase Intentions. Moreover, despite non-luxury products displaying a higher sensitivity to Review Valence, negative reviews had an equivalent effect on Purchase Intentions for all product manipulations. Hence, marketers need to exercise a high level of vigilance to across all product-luxury manipulations in online review forums.

Moreover, marketers should also understand that Review Volume tends to act through mediating variables, although it does have an important role in Information Adoption. The results indicate that a low number of reviews foster a greater intention to adopt information. Marketers should consider restricting the number of reviews available to avoid consumers being overwhelmed with 'too much' information (Park & Lee, 2008).

Finally, the study highlighted the proportion of variance in Purchase Intentions explained by these independent variables. These findings indicated that Review Valence is the most significant predictor of Purchase Intentions. In addition, marketers need to consider the mediating effect of Product Involvement, Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Materialism that are prevalent covariates in this research. In addition, any unexplained variance will elucidate to other unidentified variables are also affecting Purchase Intentions in the online environment, which presents an avenue for future research. Researchers can use these results (i.e. effects of each variable) to arrive at more accurate estimates of purchase intentions in an online review setting.

### **5.3.2 Theoretical Implications and Contributions**

Theoretically, this research made a contribution to extant literature, as a preliminary study that attempted to operationalise the varying degrees of 'luxury' attributed to products (Kapferer, 1997), and quantitatively examine the effect of product-luxury perceptions on response to online reviews and the subsequent Purchase Intentions. While previous research has postulated about the contextual antecedent of non-luxury versus luxury products on the influence of review dimensions on purchase behaviour (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; You et al., 2015), it had not been directly investigated.

This research provides added weight to previous findings, as reaffirmed that message valence was a salient review metric in decision-making that influences Purchase Intention (Ketelaar et al.,

2015; Sen & Lerman, 2007). The results also indicated a prevalent negativity bias when individuals were processing online reviews. Moreover, confirmatory evidence was provided for the extant notion which suggests greater diagnosticity and persuasiveness perceptions materialise for negative information (Fiske, 1980; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). The study also determined that a small number of reviews evoke a higher Information Adoption rate, which reinforces the notion of information scarcity enhancing the perceived usefulness of each available review (Pan & Zhang, 2011). Apart from the latter dependent measure, Review Volume was only significant through mediation effects as alluded to in previous studies (Lee et al., 2008a; Sher & Lee, 2009).

Previous research has found product characteristics elicit a mediating role on the influence of online reviews on purchase behaviour, in particular, search versus experience goods (Cui et al., 2012; Weathers et al., 2007; Yang & Mai, 2010) and utilitarian versus hedonic products (Pan & Zhang, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007). This study confirmed that product type was a moderator of Review Valence effects in the case of non-luxury, mid-luxury and high-luxury products. These preliminarily findings revealed that product-luxury perceptions moderate the occurrence of the negativity effect. The results found support for affect-confirmation theory (Adaval, 2001), as the positive predisposition expressed towards luxury products offset the negativity effect on brand attitudes. The negativity effect was less salient for luxury product reviews, when evaluating the luxury value dimensions (i.e., Status and Conspicuous Consumption, Need for Uniqueness and Social Value). This result seems to align with the latter notion, where the idiosyncratic nature and subjective judgement of product attributes lead to greater scepticism towards luxury product reviews, coupled with individuals having a strong prior expectation for pleasure, and accordingly, they may be more inclined to engage in consistency bias and minimise the influence of such negative information when it is easily refuted (Adaval, 2001; Ahluwalia, 2000). A similar positive predisposition was present for hedonic products in Sen and Lerman (2007)'s study. A key preliminary finding in this research was the differential effect of positive reviews on Purchase Intentions for varying product-luxury perceptions. Negative reviews evoked a similar response across the board, however, positive reviews led to highest Purchase Intentions being expressed towards non-luxury, and then mid-luxury, while high-luxury had the lowest purchase intentions.

Though this research was not the first to manipulate Review Valence and Review Volume in an online review context (Cui et al., 2012; Duan et al., 2008a), it is the first to examine the implications of experimentally manipulated product-luxury perceptions on the influence of online reviews and to determine the interactions between contextual dimensions of Review Valence, Review Volume and product-luxury perceptions linked to Product Type. Consequently, the current study provides a

theoretical foundation for future research into the relationship of review dimensions and luxury products on the online review influenced purchase behaviours supported here.

## 5.4 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings of this research.

This research was tested on the sunglasses product category, where the results are not necessarily generalisable to other fashion product categories. As the level of interest dedicated to knowing the sentiments of others is dependent on the focal product (Lee & Koo, 2012), since individuals could be more/ less reliant on online reviews to decipher product quality. Moreover, another product category may cause individuals to accord weight to functional goals differently, where it is possible that sunglasses are more linked to utilitarian functions (e.g., frame design, durability) while handbags, for instance, could be largely associated with self-concept enhancement (e.g., conveying status). For these reasons, the use of the results outside the sunglasses product domain is not recommended and should be exercised with caution.

The ambiguous nature of the mid-luxury and high-luxury product manipulations arouses concern. This preliminary study made a first attempt to operationalise the varying degree of perceived luxury attributed to products/ brands based on the conceptual distinction described in previous research (Kapferer, 1997; Kapferer, 2006; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). However, individuals were unable to detect the theorised discontinuity in perceived luxury associated with accessible, mass-consumed, lower-tier luxuries and the expensive, unparalleled social prestige on the upper-tier of the luxury hierarchy (Kapferer, 2006). Indeed, the decision to operationalise perceived product-luxury manipulations through the use of actual brands may have caused this obscurity.

In relation to the preceding limitation, the selection of actual brands used in this study may have restricted the applicability of these findings. The use of reasonably well-known brands (RayBan and Prada) in the sunglasses category was considered suitable for this research, in order to leverage the pre-established luxury connotations of each brand to develop the mid-luxury (RayBan) and high-luxury (Prada) conditions. As such, an issue arises in that individual differences exist in the product-luxury perceptions on the basis of prior knowledge on brand identity and market positioning indicators. Hence, some participants may have perceived RayBan as a more high-luxury than mid-luxury brand and vice versa. Indeed, this caused limitations on developing a significant Product Type manipulation and may have affected the dependent results of this research.

The issue of self-selection bias of the sample impose limitations on the extent to which results can be generalised. A total of 432 participants were included in the final sample, equating to 36 responses in each of the twelve experimental conditions. The sample consisted of participants who actively participate in Mechanical Turk tasks, which cannot be assumed to be representative of the general population of females aged 18 to 45 (Berinsky et al., 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010).

Within the parameters of this research, it was not possible to account for all exogenous variables which may affect respondents' information processing of online reviews and purchase consideration. This research did take into account the Product Involvement, Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Materialism covariates, which enabled the confounding effect of these variables to be controlled. However, it is likely that other factors may have influenced the results, such as consumer expertise. Another consideration of this study is the use of experimental design, as the same effects may not have naturally occurred as a strong purchase orientation may induce consumers to weight review metrics differently and have a more prominent risk perception which may evoke a different effect than the findings reported in this study.

## **5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH**

From the findings presented in the previous chapter, a number of directions for future research have been identified. Indeed, this research identified the mediating role of product-luxury perceptions on the influence of online reviews. Consideration of the limitations of this study indicates that further research is required to understand the differential effects in the evaluative process undergone by consumers after exposure to online review metrics, in relation to mid-luxury versus high-luxury products. While this research recognised that there was a shift in consumer responses for mid-luxury and high-luxury products, such results were interpreted with caution due to the failed manipulation check. Notably, future research needs to build on this preliminary study, and establish a way of operationalising the varying degrees of luxury attributed to products in a consistent manner.

Moreover, the effects of the covariates were identified in the previous subsections. A number of studies have previously investigated the mediating role of Product Involvement on the effects of online reviews (e.g., Gu, Park, & Konana, 2012; Kim & Sung, 2009; Lee, Park, & Han, 2008b; Park et al., 2007). However, further research could provide more detail on the relationships between Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Materialism with the constructs presented in this research. In particular, the effect of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence in relation to salience of Review Volume and Review Valence would be of interest in future research, in order to further understand the influence of Review Volume.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1 STIMULI DEVELOPMENT

#### 7.1.1 Positive Online Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★★★★☆ **Great pair of sunglasses!**

By [John B. Kalla](#) on March 10, 2010

I've been looking for a pair of sunglasses for a while now. I decided to search Amazon, and immediately found and fell in love with these RayBan sunglasses and the classic aviator style. The build quality is good and durable, while the lenses effectively reduce glare.

I am happy with my purchase.

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Good lenses**

By [W. Jones](#) on August 16, 2012

**Verified Purchase**

These are awesome! The lenses are functional and filter out reflected light, offering my eyes great UV protection. I sure do appreciate having a protective pouch to keep them in too. Would highly recommend.

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Definitely recommend**

By [Alex Fernandez](#) on March 31, 2015

I've never had a pair of sunglasses that fit as well as these! The frame is sturdy and well-made. Lenses are clear and without any scratches or defects. Surpass my expectations all the way around.

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **My favourite sunglasses!**

By [David M.](#) on August 20, 2015

My favourite pair of sunglasses! I wear them rain or shine. These RayBan sunglasses are comfortable and fit perfectly. Also, the aviator style looks great paired with a casual T-shirt. I am extremely satisfied with my purchase and would definitely buy again.

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

## 7.1.2 Negative Online Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Don't waste your money!**

By [John B. Kalla](#) on March 10, 2010

Disappointed. These sunglasses look and feel cheap. The frames are poorly constructed with stiff hinges that feel as though they might break every time you unfold the sunglasses. Don't waste your time or money!

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Uneven frames**

By [W. Jones](#) on August 16, 2012

**Verified Purchase**

The frames are uneven, where one of the arms is a good centimetre higher than the other. It makes wearing the sunglasses extremely uncomfortable, as they are clearly defective. I expected better, these sunglasses are poor quality!

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Poor quality**

By [Alex Fernandez](#) on March 31, 2015

Bought and returned. Poor quality lenses that fail to reflect the daylight glare, making it difficult to see through them. In fact, I don't think the lenses offer much UV protection at all, and are simply geared towards making a fashion statement.

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Disappointed customer**

By [David M.](#) on August 20, 2015

Nice aviator design. Not what I expected, the quality is extremely poor. The frame is constructed from cheap metal (in my opinion) and bent out way too far which makes them not fit my face properly.

► [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

## 7.2 PRE-STUDY

### 7.2.1 Information Sheet and Consent Form



Department of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship  
Email: [cwa114@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:cwa114@uclive.ac.nz)  
4/08/2015

#### Information Sheet

You have been invited to participate as a subject in a research project investigating online product reviews and purchase intentions. The aim of this research is to investigate and understand how online product reviews affect consumer intentions to purchase the featured product.

Your involvement in this research will be to participate in a short online survey which should take approximately **5-10 minutes**. You will view a product review webpage and be asked some easy questions about what you saw.

Your name and identity will not accompany your survey response and you will remain completely confidential. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of information provided. Any uncompleted surveys will be discarded. The results will be stored on University of Canterbury servers for 5 years.

The results of this survey may be published however you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of all data collected and the identity of all participants will remain anonymous. This project is being carried out as a requirement for my Honour's in Marketing at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. If you have any concerns about this project please discuss them with my supervisor, Paul Ballantine, who can be contacted at [paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee low risk process.

Thank you for your time.

Warm regards,

Researcher: Chloe Wallace ([cwa114@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:cwa114@uclive.ac.nz))

Supervisor: Paul Ballantine ([paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz))

### Consent form:

By clicking 'yes' below, you confirm the following:

- You have read and understood the description of the above-named project in the Information Sheet provided.
- On this, basis, you agree to participate as a subject in this project, and consent to the publication of the results of this project with the understanding that your confidentiality will be preserved.
- You understand also that you may withdraw from this project at any time before survey completion.
  - Yes, I confirm the above statements and would like to take part in this survey
  - No thanks

## 7.2.2 Recruitment

### Win One of Five \$100 Westfield Vouchers!



Paul Ballantine <paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz>

Tue 10/11/2015, 8:30 a.m.

mgmt100s2@course.canterbury.ac.nz; Chloe Wallace ✉



Reply all | ▼

Inbox

Hi

My name is Chloe and I have some prizes up for grabs!

I need participants to answer a few questions about an online review webpage. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete.

The exciting part is – by providing your email address upon completing the questionnaire you enter the draw to win a \$100 Westfield voucher. There are five vouchers to be won!

If you are interested in participating, please follow the link: [http://canterbury.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_cj6nKEeHPKvtvHP](http://canterbury.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cj6nKEeHPKvtvHP)

If you would like to know more about me and this study, I have included some additional information below.

Kind Regards,

Chloe Wallace

-----  
I am currently completing my Master of Commerce in Marketing and I need participants to complete an online survey as part of the research required for my thesis.

My study is investigating how consumers use online review information. The aim of this research is to understand how online product reviews affect consumer intentions to purchase the featured product. The questionnaire will require you to view an online review website for a pair of sunglasses and answer some quick questions about the content.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee low risk process. If you have any queries or concerns please feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor.

Researcher: Chloe Wallace ([chloe.wallace@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:chloe.wallace@pg.canterbury.ac.nz))

Supervisor: Paul Ballantine ([paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz))



### 7.3.1 Luxury Brand/ High Volume/ Positive Review

**amazon** Try Prime

Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry

Shop by Department

Your Amazon.com Today's Deals Gift Cards Sell Help

Hello, Sign in Your Account Try Prime Wish List Cart

## Amazon Fashion

Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry Accessories Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories Sunglasses

WOMEN MEN GIRLS BOYS BABY LUGGAGE SALES & DEALS YOUR \$ FREE RETURNS Restrictions Apply

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**Prada**

**Prada PR53QS Sunglass-ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)-60mm**

★★★★☆ · 2,074 customer reviews

List Price: ~~\$325.00~~  
Price: **\$194.00 + FREE Shipping.** FREE Returns. Details

**In stock.**  
Sold by Ibex Optics and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 60 mm
- Lens height: 53.2 mm
- Bridge: 13 mm
- Arm: 140 mm
- MODEL: PR53QS Timeless | Heritage
- COLOR: ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)
- SIZE: 60mm - 13mm - 140mm (millimeters)
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

Show less

Share

City: 1

☐ Yes, I want **FREE Two-Day Shipping** with Amazon Prime

Add to Cart

Turn on 1-Click ordering for this browser

Ship to:  
Select a shipping address:

Add to Wish List

**Other Sellers on Amazon**

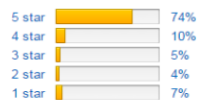
<b>\$181.55</b> + \$5.95 shipping Sold by: Shopping Zulia	Add to Cart
<b>\$190.00</b> + Free Shipping Sold by: Nyciwear	Add to Cart
<b>6 new from \$181.55</b>	

Frequently Bought Together

Prada	Prada	Prada
\$194.94 - \$331.76	\$194.94 - \$331.76	\$194.94 - \$554.41

## Customer Reviews

★★★★☆ 2,074  
4.4 out of 5 stars

[See all 2,074 customer reviews](#)

### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★★★★☆ **Great pair of sunglasses!**  
By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

I've been looking for a pair of sunglasses for a while now. I decided to search Amazon, and immediately found and fell in love with these Prada sunglasses and the classic aviator style. The build quality is good and durable, while the lenses effectively reduce glare.

I am happy with my purchase.

Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Good lenses**

By [W. Jones](#) on August 16, 2012

By W. Jones on  
Verified Purchase

These are awesome! The lenses are functional and filter out reflected light, offering my eyes great UV protection. I sure do appreciate having a protective pouch to keep them in too. Would highly recommend.

▶ [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Definitely recommend**

By [Alex Fernandez](#) on March 31, 2015

I've never had a pair of sunglasses that fit as well as these! The frame is sturdy and well-made. Lenses are clear and without any scratches or defects. Surpass my expectations all the way around.

▶ [Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **My favourite sunglasses!**

By [David M.](#) on August 20, 2015

My favourite pair of sunglasses! I wear them rain or shine. These Prada sunglasses are comfortable and fit perfectly. Also, the aviator style looks great paired with a casual T-shirt. I am extremely satisfied with my purchase and would definitely buy again.

▶ [Comment](#) Was this review helpful to you?   [Report abuse](#)

## 7.3.2 Luxury Brand/ High Volume/ Negative Review

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Prada

Prada PR53QS Sunglass-ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)-60mm

2,074 customer reviews

List Price: \$325.00

Price: \$194.00 & FREE Shipping. FREE Returns. Details

In stock.

Sold by Ibex Optics and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 60 mm
- Lens height: 53.2 mm
- Bridge: 13 mm
- Arm: 140 mm
- MODEL: PR53QS Timeless | Heritage
- COLOR: ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)
- SIZE: 60mm - 13mm - 140mm (millimeters)
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

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\$181.55

+ \$5.95 shipping

Sold by: Shopping Zulla

Add to Cart

\$190.00


+ Free Shipping

Sold by: Nyciwear

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6 new from \$181.55

Frequently Bought Together




Prada

\$194.94 - \$331.76



Prada

\$194.94 - \$331.76

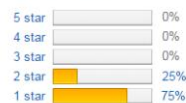


Prada

\$194.94 - \$554.41

### Customer Reviews

2,074  
1.0 out of 5 stars



Share your thoughts with other customers

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See all 2,074 customer reviews

#### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

Don't waste your money!  
By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

Disappointed. These sunglasses look and feel cheap. The frames are poorly constructed with stiff hinges that feel as though they might break every time you unfold the sunglasses. Don't waste your time or money!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

Uneven frames  
By W. Jones on August 16, 2012  
Verified Purchase

The frames are uneven, where one of the arms is a good centimetre higher than the other. It makes wearing the sunglasses extremely uncomfortable, as they are clearly defective. I expected better, these sunglasses are poor quality!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

Poor quality  
By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

Bought and returned. Poor quality lenses that fail to reflect the daylight glare, making it difficult to see through them. In fact, I don't think the lenses offer much UV protection at all, and are simply geared towards making a fashion statement.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

Disappointed customer  
By David M. on August 20, 2015

Nice aviator design. Not what I expected, the quality is extremely poor. The frame is constructed from cheap metal (in my opinion) and bent out way too far which makes them not fit my face properly.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

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### 7.3.3 Luxury Brand/ Low Volume/ Positive Review

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Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry > Accessories > Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories > Sunglasses

Roll over image to zoom in

Prada

Prada PR53QS Sunglass-ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)-60mm

★★★★★ 4 customer reviews

List Price: \$326.00

Price: \$194.00 & FREE Shipping. FREE Returns. Details

In stock.

Sold by Ibex Optics and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 60 mm
- Lens height: 53.2 mm
- Bridge: 13 mm
- Arm: 140 mm
- MODEL: PR53QS Timeless | Heritage
- COLOR: ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)
- SIZE: 60mm - 13mm - 140mm (millimeters)
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

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Qty: 1

☐ Yes, I want FREE Two-Day Shipping with Amazon Prime

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\$181.55

+ \$5.95 shipping

Sold by: Shopping Zulla

Add to Cart

\$190.00

+ Free Shipping

Sold by: Nyckwear

Add to Cart

6 new from \$181.55

Frequently Bought Together

Prada

\$194.94 - \$331.76

Prada

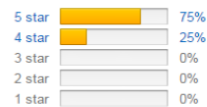
\$194.94 - \$331.76

Prada

\$194.94 - \$554.41

#### Customer Reviews

★★★★★ 4  
4.8 out of 5 stars



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Write a customer review

See all 4 customer reviews

#### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ Great pair of sunglasses!

By John B. Kalia on March 10, 2010

I've been looking for a pair of sunglasses for a while now. I decided to search Amazon, and immediately found and fell in love with these Prada sunglasses and the classic aviator style. The build quality is good and durable, while the lenses effectively reduce glare.

I am happy with my purchase.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ Good lenses

By W. Jones on August 16, 2012

Verified Purchase

These are awesome! The lenses are functional and filter out reflected light, offering my eyes great UV protection. I sure do appreciate having a protective pouch to keep them in too. Would highly recommend.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ Definitely recommend

By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

I've never had a pair of sunglasses that fit as well as these! The frame is sturdy and well-made. Lenses are clear and without any scratches or defects. Surpass my expectations all the way around.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ My favourite sunglasses!

By David M. on August 20, 2015

My favourite pair of sunglasses! I wear them rain or shine. These Prada sunglasses are comfortable and fit perfectly. Also, the aviator style looks great paired with a casual T-shirt. I am extremely satisfied with my purchase and would definitely buy again.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

## 7.3.4 Luxury Brand/ Low Volume/ Negative Review

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Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry > Accessories > Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories > Sunglasses



Roll over image to zoom in



Prada

Prada PR53QS Sunglass-ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)-60mm

★☆☆☆☆ 4 customer reviews

List Price: \$326.00

Price: **\$194.00** & FREE Shipping. FREE Returns. [Details](#)

In stock.

Sold by [Ibex Optics](#) and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 60 mm
- Lens height: 53.2 mm
- Bridge: 13 mm
- Arm: 140 mm
- MODEL: PR53QS Timeless | Heritage
- COLOR: ZVN/5Z1 Pale Gold (Polarized Gray Lens)
- SIZE: 60mm - 13mm - 140mm (millimeters)
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

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**\$181.55**  
+ \$5.95 shipping  
Sold by: [Shopping Zulla](#)


**\$190.00**  
+ Free Shipping  
Sold by: [Nyciwear](#)

6 new from **\$181.55**


Frequently Bought Together



Prada  
\$194.94 - \$331.76



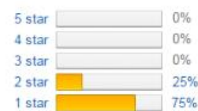
Prada  
\$194.94 - \$331.76



Prada  
\$194.94 - \$554.41

### Customer Reviews

★☆☆☆☆ 4  
1.0 out of 5 stars



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### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 265 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Don't waste your money!**

By [John B. Kalla](#) on March 10, 2010

Disappointed. These sunglasses look and feel cheap. The frames are poorly constructed with stiff hinges that feel as though they might break every time you unfold the sunglasses. Don't waste your time or money!

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Uneven frames**

By [W. Jones](#) on August 16, 2012

[Verified Purchase](#)

The frames are uneven, where one of the arms is a good centimetre higher than the other. It makes wearing the sunglasses extremely uncomfortable, as they are clearly defective. I expected better, these sunglasses are poor quality!

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Poor quality**

By [Alex Fernandez](#) on March 31, 2015

Bought and returned. Poor quality lenses that fail to reflect the daylight glare, making it difficult to see through them. In fact, I don't think the lenses offer much UV protection at all, and are simply geared towards making a fashion statement.

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★☆☆☆☆ **Disappointed customer**

By [David M.](#) on August 20, 2015

Nice aviator design. Not what I expected, the quality is extremely poor. The frame is constructed from cheap metal (in my opinion) and bent out way too far which makes them not fit my face properly.

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

## 7.3.5 Mid-Luxury Brand/ High Volume/ Positive Review

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Sunglasses



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Ray-Ban

Ray-Ban RB3025 - Aviator Large Metal Sunglasses

★★★★★ 2,074 customer reviews

List Price: \$449.99

Price: \$106.99 & FREE Shipping

Size: 58 mm

Color: Gold Frame/Green Polarized Lens

In Stock.

Sold by Micosun and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 58 mm
- Lens height: 1 mm
- Bridge: 14 mm
- Arm: 135 mm
- 2" high
- MODEL: RB3025 Aviator Large Metal
- COLOR: 001/58 Ansta Gold (Crystal Green Polarized Lens)
- SIZE: 58mm - 14mm - 135mm (millimeters)
- GENDER: Unisex
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

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Sold by: Sunglass Express

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\$119.96

+ Free Shipping

Sold by: X Wear

Add to Cart

\$122.49


FREE Shipping & FREE Returns. Details

Sold by: Rogeliowalters

18 new from \$103.00


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Frequently Bought Together




Ray-Ban

\$67.00 - \$266.82




Ray-Ban

\$75.00 - \$180.00



Ray-Ban

\$79.95 - \$299.29



Ray-Ban

\$75.00 - \$269.66

Customer Reviews

★★★★★ 2,074

4.4 out of 5 stars

5 star 74%

4 star 10%

3 star 5%

2 star 4%

1 star 7%

Share your thoughts with other customers

Write a customer review

See all 2,074 customer reviews

Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ Great pair of sunglasses!

By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

I've been looking for a pair of sunglasses for a while now. I decided to search Amazon, and immediately found and fell in love with these RayBan sunglasses and the classic aviator style. The build quality is good and durable, while the lenses effectively reduce glare.

I am happy with my purchase.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ Good lenses

By W. Jones on August 16, 2012

Verified Purchase

These are awesome! The lenses are functional and filter out reflected light, offering my eyes great UV protection. I sure do appreciate having a protective pouch to keep them in too. Would highly recommend.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ Definitely recommend

By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

I've never had a pair of sunglasses that fit as well as these! The frame is sturdy and well-made. Lenses are clear and without any scratches or defects. Surpass my expectations all the way around.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ My favourite sunglasses!

By David M. on August 20, 2015

My favourite pair of sunglasses! I wear them rain or shine. These RayBan sunglasses are comfortable and fit perfectly. Also, the aviator style looks great paired with a casual T-shirt. I am extremely satisfied with my purchase and would definitely buy again.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

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## 7.3.6 Mid-Luxury Brand/ High Volume/ Negative Review

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Other Sellers on Amazon

\$119.95

FREE Shipping & FREE Returns

Sold by: Sunglass Express

\$119.96

+ Free Shipping

Sold by: X Wear

\$122.49

FREE Shipping & FREE Returns

Sold by: Rogellowalters

18 new from \$103.00

Ray-Ban

Ray-Ban RB3025 - Aviator Large Metal Sunglasses

2,074 customer reviews

List Price: \$149.99

Price: \$106.99 & FREE Shipping

Size: 58 mm

Color: Gold Frame/Green Polarized Lens

In Stock

Sold by Micosun and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

Metal frame

Polarized

Lens width: 58 mm

Lens height: 1 mm

Bridge: 14 mm

Arm: 135 mm

2" high

MODEL: RB3025 Aviator Large Metal

COLOR: 001/58 Arista Gold (Crystal Green Polarized Lens)

SIZE: 58mm - 14mm - 135mm (millimeters)

GENDER: Unisex

WARRANTY: 1 Year

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Frequently Bought Together

Ray-Ban \$67.00 - \$266.82

Ray-Ban \$75.00 - \$180.00

Ray-Ban \$79.95 - \$299.29

Ray-Ban \$75.00 - \$269.66

Customer Reviews

2,074

1.0 out of 5 stars

5 star 0%

4 star 0%

3 star 0%

2 star 25%

1 star 75%

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Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

Don't waste your money!

By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

Disappointed. These sunglasses look and feel cheap. The frames are poorly constructed with stiff hinges that feel as though they might break every time you unfold the sunglasses. Don't waste your time or money!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

Uneven frames

By W. Jones on August 16, 2012

Verified Purchase

The frames are uneven, where one of the arms is a good centimetre higher than the other. It makes wearing the sunglasses extremely uncomfortable, as they are clearly defective. I expected better, these sunglasses are poor quality!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

Poor quality

By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

Bought and returned. Poor quality lenses that fail to reflect the daylight glare, making it difficult to see through them. In fact, I don't think the lenses offer much UV protection at all, and are simply geared towards making a fashion statement.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

Disappointed customer

By David M. on August 20, 2015

Nice aviator design. Not what I expected, the quality is extremely poor. The frame is constructed from cheap metal (in my opinion) and bent out way too far which makes them not fit my face properly.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

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## 7.3.7 Mid-Luxury Brand/ Low Volume/ Positive Review

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Sunglasses

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Ray-Ban

Ray-Ban RB3025 - Aviator Large Metal Sunglasses

★★★★★

4 customer reviews

List Price: \$149.99

Price: \$106.99 & FREE Shipping

Size:

58 mm

Color:

Gold Frame/Green Polarized Lens

In Stock.

Sold by Micosun and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 58 mm
- Lens height: 1 mm
- Bridge: 14 mm
- Arm: 135 mm
- 2" high
- MODEL: RB3025 Aviator Large Metal
- COLOR: 001/58 Arista Gold (Crystal Green Polarized Lens)
- SIZE: 58mm - 14mm - 135mm (millimeters)
- GENDER: Unisex
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

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FREE Shipping & FREE Returns. Details

Sold by: Sunglass Express

Add to Cart

\$119.96

+ Free Shipping

Sold by: X Wear

Add to Cart

\$122.49

FREE Shipping & FREE Returns. Details

Sold by: Rogeliowalters

Add to Cart

18 new from \$103.00

Frequently Bought Together

Ray-Ban

\$67.00 - \$266.82

Ray-Ban

\$75.00 - \$180.00

Ray-Ban

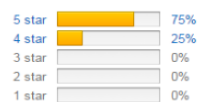
\$79.95 - \$299.29

Ray-Ban

\$75.00 - \$269.66

### Customer Reviews

★★★★★ 4  
4.8 out of 5 stars



Share your thoughts with other customers

Write a customer review

See all 4 customer reviews

### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Great pair of sunglasses!**  
By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

I've been looking for a pair of sunglasses for a while now. I decided to search Amazon, and immediately found and fell in love with these RayBan sunglasses and the classic aviator style. The build quality is good and durable, while the lenses effectively reduce glare.

I am happy with my purchase.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Good lenses**  
By W. Jones on August 16, 2012  
Verified Purchase

These are awesome! The lenses are functional and filter out reflected light, offering my eyes great UV protection. I sure do appreciate having a protective pouch to keep them in too. Would highly recommend.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Definitely recommend**  
By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

I've never had a pair of sunglasses that fit as well as these! The frame is sturdy and well-made. Lenses are clear and without any scratches or defects. Surpass my expectations all the way around.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **My favourite sunglasses!**  
By David M. on August 20, 2015

My favourite pair of sunglasses! I wear them rain or shine. These RayBan sunglasses are comfortable and fit perfectly. Also, the aviator style looks great paired with a casual T-shirt. I am extremely satisfied with my purchase and would definitely buy again.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

## 7.3.8 Mid-Luxury Brand/ Low Volume/ Negative Review

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FREE Shipping & FREE Returns. Details

Sold by: Sunglass Express

Add to Cart

\$119.96

+ Free Shipping

Sold by: X Wear

Add to Cart

\$122.49

FREE Shipping & FREE Returns. Details

Sold by: RogelIowalters

Add to Cart

18 new from \$103.00

Ray-Ban

Ray-Ban RB3025 - Aviator Large Metal Sunglasses

4 customer reviews

List Price: \$149.99

Price: \$106.99 & FREE Shipping

Size: 58 mm

Color: Gold Frame/Green Polarized Lens

In Stock.

Sold by Micosun and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Polarized
- Lens width: 58 mm
- Lens height: 1 mm
- Bridge: 14 mm
- Arm: 135 mm
- 2" high
- MODEL: RB3025 Aviator Large Metal
- COLOR: 001/58 Arista Gold (Crystal Green Polarized Lens)
- SIZE: 58mm - 14mm - 135mm (millimeters)
- GENDER: Unisex
- WARRANTY: 1 Year

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Frequently Bought Together

Ray-Ban \$67.00 - \$266.82

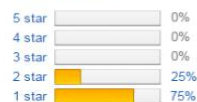
Ray-Ban \$75.00 - \$180.00

Ray-Ban \$79.95 - \$299.29

Ray-Ban \$75.00 - \$269.66

### Customer Reviews

1.0 out of 5 stars



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### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

Don't waste your money!

By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

Disappointed. These sunglasses look and feel cheap. The frames are poorly constructed with stiff hinges that feel as though they might break every time you unfold the sunglasses. Don't waste your time or money!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

Uneven frames

By W. Jones on August 16, 2012

Verified Purchase

The frames are uneven, where one of the arms is a good centimetre higher than the other. It makes wearing the sunglasses extremely uncomfortable, as they are clearly defective. I expected better, these sunglasses are poor quality!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

Poor quality

By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

Bought and returned. Poor quality lenses that fail to reflect the daylight glare, making it difficult to see through them. In fact, I don't think the lenses offer much UV protection at all, and are simply geared towards making a fashion statement.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

Disappointed customer

By David M. on August 20, 2015

Nice aviator design. Not what I expected, the quality is extremely poor. The frame is constructed from cheap metal (in my opinion) and bent out way too far which makes them not fit my face properly.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse



## 7.3.9 Non-Luxury Brand/ High Volume/ Positive Review

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Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry Accessories Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories Sunglasses



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♡

Duduma

**Duduma Classic Full Mirrored Aviator Sunglasses w/ UV Protection**

★★★★☆ 2,074 customer reviews

List Price: \$26.98  
Price: **\$12.99** & FREE Shipping

Color: Silver frame/Silver mirror lens

**In Stock.**  
Sold by Duduma Sunglasses and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Plastic lens
- Non-polarized
- Lens width: 5.7 centimeters
- Lens height: 5.2 centimeters
- Bridge: 1.5 centimeters
- Classic Aviator Style Silver Metal Frame Sunglasses
- UV400 Protection

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Qty: 1

☐ Yes, I want **FREE Two-Day Shipping** with Amazon Prime

[Add to Cart](#)

Turn on 1-Click ordering for this browser

**Ship to:**  
Select a shipping address: [▼](#)

[Add to Wish List](#)


**Other Sellers on Amazon**

**\$11.95** + Free Shipping  
Sold by: Collectors Paradise (USA SELLER)


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3 new from \$9.00


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zeroUV  
\$8.99 - \$26.99



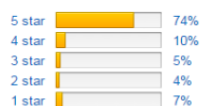
SWG EYEWEAR®  
\$13.99



Owl  
\$1.02 - \$9.65

### Customer Reviews

★★★★☆ 2,074  
4.4 out of 5 stars



Share your thoughts with other customers

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[See all 2,074 customer reviews](#)

### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

★★★★☆ **Great pair of sunglasses!**  
By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

I've been looking for a pair of sunglasses for a while now. I decided to search Amazon, and immediately found and fell in love with these sunglasses and the classic aviator style. The build quality is good and durable, while the lenses effectively reduce glare.

I am happy with my purchase.

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

★★★★☆ **Good lenses**  
By W. Jones on August 16, 2012  
**Verified Purchase**

These are awesome! The lenses are functional and filter out reflected light, offering my eyes great UV protection. I sure do appreciate having a protective pouch to keep them in too. Would highly recommend.

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

★★★★☆ **Definitely recommend**  
By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

I've never had a pair of sunglasses that fit as well as these! The frame is sturdy and well-made. Lenses are clear and without any scratches or defects. Surpass my expectations all the way around.

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful

★★★★☆ **My favourite sunglasses!**  
By David M. on August 20, 2015

My favourite pair of sunglasses! I wear them rain or shine. These sunglasses are comfortable and fit perfectly. Also, the aviator style looks great paired with a casual T-shirt. I am extremely satisfied with my purchase and would definitely buy again.

[Comment](#) | Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#) [Report abuse](#)

### 7.3.10 Non-Luxury Brand/ High Volume/ Negative Review

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Accessories

Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories

Sunglasses



Duduma

Duduma Classic Full Mirrored Aviator Sunglasses w/ UV Protection

2,074 customer reviews

List Price: \$26.98

Price: \$12.99 & FREE Shipping

Color: Silver frame/Silver mirror lens


In Stock.

Sold by Duduma Sunglasses and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Plastic lens
- Non-polarized
- Lens width: 5.7 centimeters
- Lens height: 5.2 centimeters
- Bridge: 1.5 centimeters
- Classic Aviator Style Silver Metal Frame Sunglasses
- UV400 Protection

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Yes, I want FREE Two-Day Shipping with Amazon Prime

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Other Sellers on Amazon


\$11.95

+ Free Shipping


Sold by: Collectors Paradise (USA SELLER)

3 new from \$9.00


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zeroUV  
\$8.99 - \$26.99



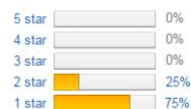
SWG EYEWEAR®  
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Owl  
\$1.02 - \$9.65

#### Customer Reviews

2,074  
1.0 out of 5 stars



Share your thoughts with other customers

Write a customer review

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#### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

271 of 285 people found the following review helpful

Don't waste your money!  
By John B. Kalla on March 10, 2010

Disappointed. These sunglasses look and feel cheap. The frames are poorly constructed with stiff hinges that feel as though they might break every time you unfold the sunglasses. Don't waste your time or money!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful

Uneven frames  
By W. Jones on August 16, 2012  
Verified Purchase

The frames are uneven, where one of the arms is a good centimetre higher than the other. It makes wearing the sunglasses extremely uncomfortable, as they are clearly defective. I expected better, these sunglasses are poor quality!

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful

Poor quality  
By Alex Fernandez on March 31, 2015

Bought and returned. Poor quality lenses that fail to reflect the daylight glare, making it difficult to see through them. In fact, I don't think the lenses offer much UV protection at all, and are simply geared towards making a fashion statement.

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Previous 1 2 3 4 ... 208 Next

### 7.3.11 Non-Luxury Brand/ Low Volume/ Positive Review

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FREE RETURNS


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Accessories


Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories

Sunglasses





Roll over image to zoom in



Duduma

Duduma Classic Full Mirrored Aviator Sunglasses w/ UV Protection

★★★★★ 4 customer reviews

List Price: \$26.98

Price: \$12.99 & FREE Shipping

Color: Silver frame/Silver mirror lens

In Stock.

Sold by Duduma Sunglasses and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Plastic lens
- Non-polarized
- Lens width: 5.7 centimeters
- Lens height: 5.2 centimeters
- Bridge: 1.5 centimeters
- Classic Aviator Style Silver Metal Frame Sunglasses
- UV400 Protection

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Yes, I want FREE Two-Day Shipping with Amazon Prime

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Select a shipping address:

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Other Sellers on Amazon


\$11.95

+ Free Shipping

Sold by: Collectors Paradise (USA SELLER)


3 new from \$9.00

Frequently Bought Together




zeroUV

\$8.99 - \$26.99



SWG EYEWEAR®

\$13.99



Owl

\$1.02 - \$9.65

#### Customer Reviews

★★★★★ 4  
4.8 out of 5 stars

5 star	75%
4 star	25%
3 star	0%
2 star	0%
1 star	0%

Share your thoughts with other customers

Write a customer review

See all 4 customer reviews

#### Most Helpful Customer Reviews

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Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

175

## 7.3.12 Non-Luxury Brand/ Low Volume/ Negative Review

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Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry

Accessories

Sunglasses & Eyewear Accessories

Sunglasses



Roll over image to zoom in

Duduma

Duduma Classic Full Mirrored Aviator Sunglasses w/ UV Protection

★☆☆☆☆ 4 customer reviews

List Price: \$25.98

Price: \$12.99 & FREE Shipping

Color: Silver frame/Silver mirror lens

In Stock.

Sold by Duduma Sunglasses and Fulfilled by Amazon. Gift-wrap available.

- Metal frame
- Plastic lens
- Non-polarized
- Lens width: 5.7 centimeters
- Lens height: 5.2 centimeters
- Bridge: 1.5 centimeters
- Classic Aviator Style Silver Metal Frame Sunglasses
- UV400 Protection

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Qty: 1

Yes, I want FREE Two-Day Shipping with Amazon Prime

Add to Cart

Turn on 1-Click ordering for this browser

Ship to:

Select a shipping address:

Add to Wish List

Other Sellers on Amazon

\$11.95


Free Shipping

Sold by: Collectors Paradise (USA SELLER)

Add to Cart


3 new from \$9.00

Frequently Bought Together




zeroUV

\$8.99 - \$26.99



SWG EYEWEAR®

\$13.99

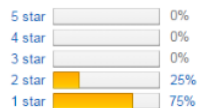


Owl

\$1.02 - \$9.65

### Customer Reviews

★☆☆☆☆ 4  
1.0 out of 5 stars



Share your thoughts with other customers

Write a customer review

See all 4 customer reviews

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Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

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Nice aviator design. Not what I expected, the quality is extremely poor. The frame is constructed from cheap metal (in my opinion) and bent out way too far which makes them not fit my face properly.

Comment Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

## 7.4 FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

### 7.4.1 Section One: Information and Consent



#### **Information Sheet**

You have been invited to participate as a subject in a research project investigating how people use online review information. The aim of this research is to understand how online product reviews affect consumer intentions to purchase the featured product.

Your involvement in this research will be to read some online consumer reviews prior to completing a short survey which should take approximately **10 minutes**. Please take some time to **read the online reviews** posted on the webpage. Once you have viewed the product review webpage, you will be asked some questions about what you saw.

Your name and identity will not accompany your survey response and your answers will remain completely confidential. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of information provided. Any uncompleted surveys will be discarded. The results will be stored on University of Canterbury servers for 5 years.

The results of this survey may be published, however, you can be assured of the complete confidentiality of all data collected and the identity of all participants will remain anonymous. This project is being carried out as a requirement for my postgraduate degree in marketing at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. If you have any concerns about this project please discuss them with my supervisor, Paul Ballantine, who can be contacted at [paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee low risk process.

Thank you for your time.

Warm regards,

**Researcher: Chloe Wallace** ([chloe.wallace@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:chloe.wallace@pg.canterbury.ac.nz))

**Supervisor: Paul Ballantine** ([paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz))

#### **Consent form:**

By clicking 'yes' below, you confirm the following:

- You have read and understood the description of the above-named project in the Information Sheet provided.
- On this basis, you agree to participate as a subject in this project, and consent to the publication of the results of this project with the understanding that your confidentiality will be preserved.
- You understand also that you may withdraw from this project at anytime before survey completion.

☐ Yes, I confirm the above statements and would like to take part in this survey

☐ No, thanks

This study requires **female** participants, aged **18 to 45**.

Do you fit the above requirements?

☐ Yes I am a female, 18 to 45 years of age

☐ No

### 7.4.2 Section Two: Stimuli Exposure



View the webpage presented below, and take some time to **read the online consumer reviews** posted for the pair of sunglasses. Once the timer has expired, an arrow will appear at the bottom right-hand corner of this page allowing you to advance to the next page. The following pages will require you to answer questions about the webpage content and online reviews.



Please confirm that you have viewed the webpage presented above, and read the featured product reviews.

☐ Yes, I have viewed the webpage content and read the product reviews



### 7.4.3 Section Three: Independent Measures

#### 7.4.3.1 Review Valence



Please indicate the extent to which you agree/ disagree with the following statements about the online reviews presented on the webpage.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Overall, the online reviews positively evaluate the product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most of the online reviews recommend buying the product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 7.4.3.2 Review Volume



Recalling the webpage content, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Many consumers have posted reviews about the sunglasses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The sunglasses have a large number of online reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 7.4.3.3 Product Type



How do you perceive the **RayBan brand** for sunglasses?

Affordable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely expensive
Not prestigious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Prestigious
Literal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Symbolic
Ordinary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Distinctive

#### 7.4.4 Section Four: Dependent Measures and Covariate Measures



After reading the online reviews, please consider the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The user reviews provided were useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think I learned a lot about the reviewed sunglasses after reading the user reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The user reviews provided valuable information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/ disagree with the following statements on the message content of the online reviews presented.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The arguments of these reviews were convincing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The arguments of these reviews were persuasive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The arguments of these reviews were strong	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The arguments of these reviews were good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The arguments of these reviews were helpful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/ disagree with the following statements about the online reviews for the focal product.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I will refer to this online information in a purchase decision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I think this online information is credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online information will significantly affect my purchase decision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Recalling the online reviews you viewed, please indicate how you would describe the reviews?

Not at all useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very useful
Not at all accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very accurate
Not informative at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very informative

Please indicate the extent to which you agree/ disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Reviews make it easier for me to make a purchase decision (i.e. purchase or not purchase)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online reviews have enhanced my effectiveness in making purchase decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online reviews have motivated me to make a purchase decision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The last time I read online reviews I adopted consumers' recommendations and purchased (or not purchased) the recommended product/ service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Recalling the online product reviews you read, how would you **evaluate the sunglasses** listed:

Dislike it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Like it
Unfavorable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favorable
Negative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Positive
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Not useable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Useable

Recalling the online review webpage, please describe your **overall feelings about the RayBan brand**:

Unappealing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Appealing
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Pleasant
Unfavourable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Favourable
Unlikeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Likeable

Recall the product description and consumer reviews for **RayBan sunglasses**.

With regards to the branded product discussed on the webpage, consider the following statements and indicate your level of agreement with each.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This product/ brand is a symbol of professional success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product/ brand is a symbol of prestige	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product/ brand indicates my wealth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People who buy this product/ brand are interested in status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product/ brand would help me gain respect	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product/ brand would help me gain popularity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product/ brand lets people know who I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Recall the product description and consumer reviews for **RayBan sunglasses**.

With regards to the branded product discussed on the webpage, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would purchase this branded product in order to create a style that is all my own	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would tell people that I am different	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would add to my personal identity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would develop my personal uniqueness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would communicate my uniqueness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product is interesting and unusual, and will assist me in establishing a distinctive image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would express my individuality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would help create a personal image for myself that cannot be duplicated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would purchase this branded product to create a more distinctive personal image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This branded product would be used to shape my personal image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Recall the product description and customer reviews for the **RayBan sunglasses**.

With regards to the branded product on the webpage, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This product would help me to feel accepted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product would help improve the way I am perceived by others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product would make a good impression on other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product would give its owner social approval	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Considering the online reviews you read, please indicate the probability that you would purchase these sunglasses in the future using the following items.

Unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Likely
Improbable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Probable
Impossible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Possible

Imagine that you are shopping for a new pair of sunglasses.

The following question requires you to judge your purchase decision against a series of descriptive scales according to how you perceive the product.

Please indicate your position on the scale for each item.

Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Important
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant
Boring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting
Unexciting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Exciting
Mundane	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fascinating
Uninvolving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Involving

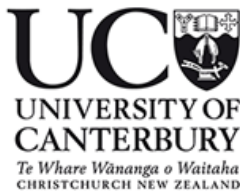
Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements based on your personal orientation.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If you are reading this question, please select strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I usually buy only the things I need	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Considering the **influence of other people on your consumption behaviour**, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands I think others will approve of	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I had little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I frequently gather information from friends and family about a product before I buy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 7.4.5 Section Five: Socio-demographics and Demographics



Considering your attitude towards online reviews, please indicate the extent to which you agree/ disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
When I buy a product online, I always read the reviews that are presented on the website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I buy a product online, the reviews presented on the website are helpful in my decision making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If you are reading this question, please select strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I buy a product online, the reviews presented on the website make me confident in purchasing the product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your attitude towards online reviews.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am comfortable with reading online reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have used online reviews to help me make a decision about a product or service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the past, my decisions have been influenced by reviews that I read online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to discuss my product/service experience with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to learn about others' product and service experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, providing and receiving word-of-mouth helps consumers make better decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Considering your level of **familiarity with the RayBan brand**, please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am familiar with the brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm very knowledgeable about this brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have seen many advertisements about this brand in the mass media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your **general knowledge** on the **sunglasses product category**?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know a lot about sunglasses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel very knowledgeable about sunglasses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Among my circle of friends, I'm one of the 'experts' on sunglasses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compared to most other people, I know less about sunglasses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When it comes to sunglasses, I really don't know a lot	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Considering your **attitude towards the RayBan brand**, please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The RayBan brand is good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I dislike the RayBan brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The RayBan brand is pleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The RayBan brand offers high quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consider your **general favourability** towards the website, **Amazon.com**, you just viewed. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This website makes it easy for me to build a relationship with the online community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to visit this website again in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm satisfied with the services provided by the website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable in surfing the website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compared with other online review websites, I would rate this one as the best one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Recall the **consumer reviews** about the sunglasses on **Amazon.com**.

Consider your feelings towards these reviews, and indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The reviewers are trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The reviewers would be honest in their feedback on the sunglasses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The reviewers appear to be dependable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The reviewers seem to be sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male  
☐ Female

What is your current age?

- ☐ Less than 18  
☐ 18 to 25  
☐ 26 to 30  
☐ 31 to 35  
☐ 36 to 40  
☐ 41 to 45  
☐ 46 to 50  
☐ 51 to 55  
☐ 56 or over

Please select the option which best describes your current employment.

- ☐ Full-time work  
☐ Part-time work  
☐ Student  
☐ Retired  
☐ Unemployed

Please indicate the option that best describes your level of income in relation to others in the population.

- ☐ Lower third  
☐ Middle third  
☐ Upper third  
☐ Unsure  
☐ Rather not say

Please indicate the highest level of education completed.

- ☐ Primary school  
☐ High school or equivalent  
☐ University  
☐ Master's Degree (MS)  
☐ Doctoral Degree (PhD)  
☐ Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)

Please provide your worker ID by entering it in the field below.

Have you consulted an online review website in the last three months?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Please indicate your general use of sunglasses:

- ☐ Never  
☐ Rarely  
☐ Sometimes  
☐ Often  
☐ All of the Time

#### 7.4.6 Section Six: Finish and Debrief



##### **Full disclosure statement:**

**Thank you! Your response has been submitted.**

Thank you for taking part in this research. Below is a debrief to further explain the contents of the survey you just completed. Again, if you have any further questions or concerns about the research you have taken part in please feel free to contact us.

Researcher: Chloe Wallace (chloe.wallace@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)  
Supervisor: Paul Ballantine (paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz)

Research title: The effects of electronic word-of-mouth information direction, volume and product type on consumer purchase intentions.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how variations of positively- or negatively-framed information, review volume and product type can influence purchase intentions.

Everyone who participated was exposed to one of twelve experimental conditions that manipulated the positive- or negative-framing of online reviews, the number of online reviews presented, and a luxury or non-luxury branded product. You were then required to answer a questionnaire about the content of the simulated online review website to which you were exposed. These questions were measuring your evaluation of the featured product based on the online reviews you read, and assessing your overall purchase intentions.

The results of this study will help to further understand how online reviews affect consumer purchase intentions for luxury versus non-luxury products.

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.  
Your response has been recorded.

0%  100%



## 7.5 ETHICS APPROVAL



### HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: HEC 2015/57/LR

2 September 2015

Chloe Wallace  
Department of Management, Marketing & Entrepreneurship  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Chloe

Thank you for forwarding your Human Ethics Committee Low Risk application for your research proposal "The effects of electronic word-of-mouth valence, volume and product type on consumer purchase intentions".

I am pleased to advise that the application has been reviewed and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 31 August 2015.

With best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. MacDonald'.

Lindsey MacDonald  
***Chair, Human Ethics Committee***